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WORKS

OF

CHARLES DICKENS.

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AND JOHN GILBERT.

DOMBEY AND SON.

VOL. II.

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DOMBEY AND SON.

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DOMBEY AND SON.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT THE WAVES WERE ALWAYS SAYING.

Paul had never risen from his little bed. He lay there, listening to the noises in the street, quite tranquilly; not caring much how the time went, but watching it and watching everything about him with observing eyes.

When the sunbeams struck into his room through the rustling blinds, and quivered on the opposite wall like golden water, he knew that evening was coming on, and that the sky was red and beautiful. As the reflection died away, and a gloom went creeping up the wall, he watched it deepen, deepen, deepen, into night. Then he thought how the long streets were dotted with lamps, and how the peaceful stars were shining overhead. His fancy had a strange tendency to wander to the river, which he knew was flowing through the great city: and now he thought how black it was, and how deep it would look, reflecting the hosts of stars — and more than all, how steadily it rolled away to meet the sea.

As it grew later in the night, and footsteps in the street became so rare that he could hear them coming, count them as they paused, and lose them in the hollow

distance, he would lie and watch the many-colored ring about the candle, and wait patiently for day. His only trouble was, the swift and rapid river. He felt forced, sometimes, to try to stop it — to stem it with his childish hands — or choke its way with sand — and when he saw it coming on, resistless, he cried out! But a word from Florence, who was always at his side, restored him to himself; and leaning his poor head upon her breast, he told Floy of his dream, and smiled.

When day began to dawn again, he watched for the sun; and when its cheerful light began to sparkle in the room, he pictured to himself — pictured! he saw — the high church towers rising up into the morning sky, the town reviving, waking, starting into life once more, the river, glistening as it rolled (but rolling fast as ever), and the country bright with dew. Familiar sounds and cries came by degrees into the street below; the servants in the house were roused and busy; faces looked in at the door, and voices asked his attendants softly how he was. Paul always answered for himself, "I am better. I am a great deal better, thank you! Tell papa so!"

By little and little, he got tired of the bustle of the day, the noise of carriages and carts, and people passing and re-passing; and would fall asleep, or be troubled with a restless and uneasy sense again — the child could hardly tell whether this were in his sleeping or his waking moments — of that rushing river. "Why, will it never stop, Floy?" he would sometimes ask her. "It is bearing me away, I think!"

But Floy could always soothe and reassure him; and it was his daily delight to make her lay her head down on his pillow, and take some rest.

"You are always watching me, Floy. Let me watch

you, now!" They would prop him up with cushions in a corner of his bed, and there he would recline the while she lay beside him: bending forward oftentimes to kiss her, and whispering to those who were near that she was tired, and how she had sat up so many nights beside him.

Thus, the flush of the day, in its heat and light, would gradually decline; and again the golden water would be dancing on the wall.

He was visited by as many as three grave doctors — they used to assemble down stairs, and come up together — and the room was so quiet, and Paul was so observant of them (though he never asked of anybody what they said), that he even knew the difference in the sound of their watches. But his interest centred in Sir Parker Peps, who always took his seat on the side of the bed. For Paul had heard them say long ago, that that gentleman had been with his mama when she clasped Florence in her arms, and died. And he could not forget it, now. He liked him for it. He was not afraid.

The people round him changed as unaccountably as on that first night at Doctor Blimber's — except Florence; Florence never changed — and what had been Sir Parker Peps, was now his father, sitting with his head upon his hand. Old Mrs. Pipchin dozing in an easy chair, often changed to Miss Tox, or his aunt; and Paul was quite content to shut his eyes again, and see what happened next without emotion. But this figure with its head upon its hand returned so often, and remained so long, and sat so still and solemn, never speaking, never being spoken to, and rarely lifting up its face, that Paul began to wonder languidly, if it were real; and in the night-time saw it sitting there, with fear.

"Floy!" he said. "What *is* that?"

"Where, dearest?"

"There! at the bottom of the bed."

"There's nothing there, except papa?"

The figure lifted up its head, and rose, and coming to the bedside, said: "My own boy! Don't you know me?"

Paul looked it in the face, and thought, was this his father? But the face, so altered to his thinking, thrilled while he gazed, as if it were in pain; and before he could reach out both his hands to take it between them, and draw it towards him, the figure turned away quickly from the little bed, and went out at the door.

Paul looked at Florence with a fluttering heart, but he knew what she was going to say, and stopped her with his face against her lips. The next time he observed the figure sitting at the bottom of the bed, he called to it.

"Don't be so sorry for me, dear papa! Indeed I am quite happy!"

His father coming, and bending down to him — which he did quickly, and without first pausing by the bedside — Paul held him round the neck, and repeated those words to him several times, and very earnestly; and Paul never saw him in his room again at any time, whether it were day or night, but he called out, "Don't be so sorry for me! Indeed I am quite happy!" This was the beginning of his always saying in the morning that he was a great deal better, and that they were to tell his father so.

How many times the golden water danced upon the wall; how many nights the dark, dark river rolled towards the sea in spite of him; Paul never counted, never sought to know. If their kindness or his sense of it,

could have increased, they were more kind, and he more grateful every day; but whether they were many days or few, appeared of little moment now to the gentle boy.

One night he had been thinking of his mother, and her picture in the drawing-room down stairs, and had thought she must have loved sweet Florence better than his father did, to have held her in her arms when she felt that she was dying — for even he, her brother, who had such dear love for her, could have no greater wish than that. The train of thought suggested to him to inquire if he had ever seen his mother? for he could not remember whether they had told him yes or no, the river running very fast, and confusing his mind.

"Floy, did I ever see mama?"

"No, darling, why?"

"Did I never see any kind face, like mama's, looking at me when I was a baby, Floy?"

He asked, incredulously as if he had some vision of a face before him.

"Oh yes, dear!"

"Whose, Floy?"

"Your old nurse's. Often."

"And where is my old nurse!" said Paul. "Is she dead too? Floy, are we *all* dead, except you?"

There was a hurry in the room for an instant — longer, perhaps; but it seemed no more — then all was still again; and Florence, with her face quite colorless, but smiling, held his head upon her arm. Her arm trembled very much.

"Show me that old nurse, Floy, if you please!"

"She is not here, darling. She shall come to-morrow."

"Thank you, Floy!"

Paul closed his eyes with those words, and fell asleep. When he awoke the sun was high, and the broad day was clear and warm. He lay a little, looking at the windows, which were open, and the curtains rustling in the air, and waving to and fro: then he said, "Floy, is it to-morrow? Is she come?"

Some one seemed to go in quest of her. Perhaps it was Susan. Paul thought he heard her telling him when he had closed his eyes again, that she would soon be back; but he did not open them to see. She kept her word — perhaps she had never been away — but the next thing that happened was a noise of footsteps on the stairs, and then Paul woke — woke mind and body — and sat upright in his bed. He saw them now about him. There was no gray mist before them, as there had been sometimes in the night. He knew them every one, and called them by their names.

"And who is this? Is this my old nurse?" said the child, regarding with a radiant smile, a figure coming in.

Yes, yes. No other stranger would have shed those tears at sight of him, and called him her dear boy, her pretty boy, her own poor blighted child. No other woman would have stooped down by his bed, and taken up his wasted hand, and put it to her lips and breast, as one who had some right to fondle it. No other woman would have so forgotten everybody there but him and Floy, and been so full of tenderness and pity.

"Floy! this is a kind good face!" said Paul. "I am glad to see it again. Don't go away, old nurse! Stay here!"

His senses were all quickened, and he heard a name he knew.

"Who was that, who said 'Walter'?" he asked, looking round. "Some one said Walter. Is he here? I should like to see him very much."

Nobody replied directly; but his father soon said to Susan, "Call him back, then: let him come up!" After a short pause of expectation, during which he looked with smiling interest and wonder on his nurse, and saw that she had not forgotten Floy, Walter was brought into the room. His open face and manner, and his cheerful eyes, had always made him a favorite with Paul; and when Paul saw him, he stretched out his hand, and said, "Good-by!"

"Good-by, my child!" cried Mrs. Pipchin, hurrying to his bed's head. "Not good-by!"

For an instant Paul looked at her with the wistful face with which he had so often gazed upon her in his corner by the fire. "Ah yes," he said, placidly, "good-by! Walter dear, good-by!" — turning his head to where he stood, and putting out his hand again. "Where is papa?"

He felt his father's breath upon his cheek, before the words had parted from his lips.

"Remember Walter, dear papa," he whispered, looking in his face. "Remember Walter. I was fond of Walter!" The feeble hand waved in the air, as if it cried "good-by!" to Walter once again.

"Now lay me down," he said, "and Floy, come close to me, and let me see you!"

Sister and brother wound their arms around each other, and the golden light came streaming in, and fell upon them, locked together.

"How fast the river runs, between its green banks and the rushes, Floy! But it's very near the sea. I hear the waves! They always said so!"

Presently he told her that the motion of the boat upon the stream was lulling him to rest. How green the banks were now, how bright the flowers growing on them, and how tall the rushes! Now the boat was out at sea, but gliding smoothly on. And now there was a shore before him. Who stood on the bank! —

He put his hands together, as he had been used to do at his prayers. He did not remove his arms to do it; but they saw him fold them so, behind her neck.

"Mama is like you, Floy. I know her by the face! But tell them that the print upon the stairs at school is not divine enough. The light about the head is shining on me as I go!"

The golden ripple on the wall came back again, and nothing else stirred in the room. The old, old fashion! The fashion that came in with our first garments, and will last unchanged until our race has run its course, and the wide firmament is rolled up like a scroll. The old, old fashion — Death!

Oh thank God, all who see it, for that older fashion yet, of Immortality! And look upon us, angels of young children, with regards not quite estranged, when the swift river bears us to the ocean!

CHAPTER XVII.

CAPTAIN CUTTLE DOES A LITTLE BUSINESS FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE.

Captain Cuttle, in the exercise of that surprising talent for deep-laid and unfathomable scheming, with which (as is not unusual in men of transparent simplicity) he sincerely believed himself to be endowed by nature, had gone to Mr. Dombey's house on the eventful Sunday, winking all the way as a vent for his superfluous sagacity, and had presented himself in the full lustre of the ankle-jacks before the eyes of Towlinson. Hearing from that individual, to his great concern, of the impending calamity, Captain Cuttle, in his delicacy, sheered off again confounded; merely handing in the nosegay as a small mark of his solicitude, and leaving his respectful compliments for the family in general, which he accompanied with an expression of his hope that they would lay their heads well to the wind under existing circumstances, and a friendly intimation that he would "look up again" to-morrow.

The captain's compliments were never heard of any more. The captain's nosegay, after lying in the hall all night, was swept into the dust-bin next morning; and the captain's sly arrangement, involved in one catastrophe with greater hopes and loftier designs, was crushed to pieces. So, when an avalanche bears down a moun-

tain-forest, twigs and bushes suffer with the trees, and all perish together.

When Walter returned home on the Sunday evening from his long walk, and its memorable close, he was too much occupied at first by the tidings he had to give them, and by the emotions naturally awakened in his breast by the scene through which he had passed, to observe either that his uncle was evidently unacquainted with the intelligence the captain had undertaken to impart, or that the captain made signals with his hook, warning him to avoid the subject. Not that the captain's signals were calculated to have proved very comprehensible, however attentively observed; for, like those Chinese sages who are said in their conferences to write certain learned words in the air that are wholly impossible of pronunciation, the captain made such waves and flourishes as nobody without a previous knowledge of his mystery, would have been at all likely to understand.

Captain Cuttle, however, becoming cognizant of what had happened, relinquished these attempts, as he perceived the slender chance that now existed of his being able to obtain a little easy chat with Mr. Dombey before the period of Walter's departure. But in admitting to himself, with a disappointed and crest-fallen countenance, that Sol Gills must be told, and that Walter must go — taking the case for the present as he found it, and not having it enlightened or improved beforehand by the knowing management of a friend — the captain still felt an unabated confidence that he, Ned Cuttle, was the man for Mr. Dombey; and that, to set Walter's fortunes quite square, nothing was wanted but that they two should come together. For the captain never could

forget how well he and Mr. Dombey had got on at Brighton; with what nicety each of them had put in a word when it was wanted; how exactly they had taken one another's measure; nor how Ned Cuttle had pointed out that resource in the first extremity, and had brought the interview to the desired termination. On all these grounds the captain soothed himself with thinking that though Ned Cuttle was forced by the pressure of events to "stand by" almost useless for the present, Ned would fetch up with a wet sail in good time, and carry all before him.

Under the influence of this good-natured delusion, Captain Cuttle even went so far as to revolve in his own bosom, while he sat looking at Walter and listening with a tear on his shirt-collar to what he related, whether it might not be at once genteel and polite to give Mr. Dombey a verbal invitation, whenever they should meet, to come and cut his mutton in Brig Place on some day of his own naming, and enter on the question of his young friend's prospects over a social glass. But the uncertain temper of Mrs. MacStinger, and the possibility of her setting up her rest in the passage during such an entertainment, and there delivering some homily of an uncomplimentary nature, operated as a check on the captain's hospitable thoughts, and rendered him timid of giving them encouragement.

One fact was quite clear to the captain, as Walter, sitting thoughtfully over his untasted dinner, dwelt on all that had happened; namely, that however Walter's modesty might stand in the way of his perceiving it himself, he was, as one might say, a member of Mr. Dombey's family. He had been, in his own person, connected with the incident he so pathetically described;

he had been by name remembered and commended in close association with it; and his fortunes must have a particular interest in his employer's eyes. If the captain had any lurking doubt whatever of his own conclusions, he had not the least doubt that they were good conclusions for the peace of mind of the instrument-maker. Therefore he availed himself of so favorable a moment for breaking the West Indian intelligence to his old friend, as a piece of extraordinary preferment; declaring that for his part he would freely give a hundred thousand pounds (if he had it) for Walter's gain in the long-run, and that he had no doubt such an investment would yield a handsome premium.

Solomon Gills was at first stunned by the communication, which fell upon the little back-parlor like a thunderbolt, and tore up the hearth savagely. But the captain flashed such golden prospects before his dim sight: hinted so mysteriously at Whittingtonian consequences: laid such emphasis on what Walter had just now told them: and appealed to it so confidently as a corroboration of his predictions, and a great advance towards the realization of the romantic legend of Lovely Peg: that he bewildered the old man. Walter, for his part, feigned to be so full of hope and ardor, and so sure of coming home again soon, and backed up the captain with such expressive shakings of his head and rubbings of his hands, that Solomon, looking first at him and then at Captain Cuttle, began to think he ought to be transported with joy.

"But I'm behind the time, you understand," he observed in apology, passing his hand nervously down the whole row of bright buttons on his coat, and then up again, as if they were beads and he were telling

them twice over: "and I would rather have my dear boy here. It's an old-fashioned notion, I dare say. He was always fond of the sea. He's"—and he looked wistfully at Walter—"he's glad to go."

"Uncle Sol!" cried Walter, quickly, "if you say that, I *won't* go. No, Captain Cuttle, I won't. If my uncle thinks I could be glad to leave him, though I was going to be made Governor of all the Islands in the West Indies, that's enough. I'm a fixture."

"Wal'r, my lad," said the captain. "Steady! Sol Gills, take an observation of your nevy."

Following with his eyes the majestic action of the captain's hook, the old man looked at Walter.

"Here is a certain craft," said the captain, with a magnificent sense of the allegory into which he was soaring, "a-going to put out on a certain voyage. What name is wrote upon that craft indelibly? Is it The Gay? or," said the captain, raising his voice as much as to say, observe the point of this, "is it The Gills?"

"Ned," said the old man, drawing Walter to his side, and taking his arm tenderly through his, "I know. I know. Of course I know that Wally considers me more than himself always. That's in my mind. When I say he is glad to go, I mean I hope he is. Eh? look you, Ned, and you too, Wally, my dear, this is new and unexpected to me; and I'm afraid my being behind the time, and poor, is at the bottom of it. Is it really good fortune for him, do you tell me, now?" said the old man, looking anxiously from one to the other. "Really and truly? I can reconcile myself to almost anything that advances Wally, but I won't have Wally putting himself at any disadvantage for me, or keeping anything from me. You, Ned Cuttle!" said

the old man, fastening on the captain, to the manifest confusion of that diplomatist; "are you dealing plainly by your old friend? Speak out, Ned Cuttle. Is there anything behind? Ought he to go? How do you know it first, and why?"

As it was a contest of affection and self-denial, Walter struck in with infinite effect, to the captain's relief; and between them they tolerably reconciled old Sol Gills, by continued talking, to the project; or rather so confused him, that nothing, not even the pain of separation, was distinctly clear to his mind.

He had not much time to balance the matter; for on the very next day, Walter received from Mr. Carker the manager, the necessary credentials for his passage and outfit, together with the information that the Son and Heir would sail in a fortnight, or within a day or two afterwards at latest. In the hurry of preparation: which Walter purposely enhanced as much as possible: the old man lost what little self-possession he ever had; and so the time of departure drew on rapidly.

The captain, who did not fail to make himself acquainted with all that passed, through inquiries of Walter from day to day, found the time still tending on towards his going away, without any occasion offering itself, or seeming likely to offer itself, for a better understanding of his position. It was after much consideration of this fact, and much pondering over such an unfortunate combination of circumstances, that a bright idea occurred to the captain. Suppose he made a call on Mr. Carker, and tried to find out from *him* how the land really lay!

Captain Cuttle liked this idea very much. It came upon him in a moment of inspiration, as he was smoking

an early pipe in Brig-place after breakfast; and it was worthy of the tobacco. It would quiet his conscience, which was an honest one, and was made a little uneasy by what Walter had confided to him, and what Sol Gills had said; and it would be a deep, shrewd act of friendship. He would sound Mr. Carker carefully, and say much or little, just as he read that gentleman's character, and discovered that they got on well together or the reverse.

Accordingly, without the fear of Walter before his eyes (who he knew was at home packing), Captain Cuttle again assumed his ankle-jacks and mourning brooch, and issued forth on this second expedition. He purchased no propitiatory nosegay on the present occasion, as he was going to a place of business; but he put a small sunflower in his button-hole to give himself an agreeable relish of the country; and with this, and the knobby stick, and the glazed hat, bore down upon the offices of Dombey and Son.

After taking a glass of warm rum-and-water at a tavern close by, to collect his thoughts, the captain made a rush down the court lest its good effects should evaporate, and appeared suddenly to Mr. Perch.

"Matey," said the captain, in persuasive accents. "One of your governors is named Carker."

Mr. Perch admitted it; but gave him to understand, as in official duty bound, that all his governors were engaged, and never expected to be disengaged any more.

"Look'ee here, mate," said the captain in his ear; "my name's Cap'en Cuttle."

The captain would have hooked Perch gently to him, but Mr. Perch eluded the attempt; not so much in design, as in starting at the sudden thought that such a

weapon unexpectedly exhibited to Mrs. Perch might, in her then condition, be destructive to that lady's hopes.

"If you'll be so good as just report Cap'en Cuttle here, when you get a chance," said the captain, "I'll wait."

Saying which, the captain took his seat on Mr. Perch's bracket, and drawing out his handkerchief from the crown of the glazed hat, which he jammed between his knees (without injury to its shape, for nothing human could bend it), rubbed his head well all over, and appeared refreshed. He subsequently arranged his hair with his hook, and sat looking round the office, contemplating the clerks with a serene aspect.

The captain's equanimity was so impenetrable, and he was altogether so mysterious a being, that Perch the messenger was daunted.

"What name was it you said?" asked Mr. Perch, bending down over him as he sat on the bracket.

"Cap'en," in a deep hoarse whisper.

"Yes," said Mr. Perch, keeping time with his head.

"Cuttle."

"Oh!" said Mr. Perch, in the same tone, for he caught it, and couldn't help it; the captain, in his diplomacy, was so impressive. "I'll see if he's disengaged now. I don't know. Perhaps he may be for a minute."

"Ay, ay, my lad, I won't detain him longer than a minute," said the captain, nodding with all the weighty importance that he felt within him. Perch, soon returning, said, "Will Captain Cuttle walk this way?"

Mr. Carker the manager, standing on the hearth-rug before the empty fire-place, which was ornamented with a castellated sheet of brown paper, looked at the

captain as he came in, with no very special encouragement.

"Mr. Carker?" said Captain Cuttle.

"I believe so," said Mr. Carker, showing all his teeth.

The captain liked his answering with a smile: it looked pleasant. "You see," began the captain, rolling his eyes slowly round the little room, and taking in as much of it as his shirt-collar permitted; "I'm a seafaring man myself, Mr. Carker, and Wal'r, as is on your books here, is a'most a son of mine."

"Walter Gay?" said Mr. Carker, showing all his teeth again.

"Wal'r Gay it is," replied the captain, "right!" The captain's manner expressed a warm approval of Mr. Carker's quickness of perception. "I'm a intimate friend of his and his uncle's. Perhaps," said the captain, "you may have heard your head-governor mention my name? — Captain Cuttle."

"No!" said Mr. Carker, with a still wider demonstration than before.

"Well," resumed the captain, "I've the pleasure of his acquaintance. I waited upon him down on the Sussex coast there, with my young friend Wal'r, when — in short, when there was a little accommodation wanted." The captain nodded his head in a manner that was at once comfortable, easy, and expressive. "You remember, I dare say?"

"I think," said Mr. Carker, "I had the honor of arranging the business."

"To be sure!" returned the captain. "Right again! you had. Now I've took the liberty of coming here" —

"Won't you sit down?" said Mr. Carker, smiling.

"Thank'ee," returned the captain, availing himself of the offer. "A man does get more way upon himself, perhaps, in his conversation, when he sits down. Won't you take a cheer yourself?"

"No thank you," said the manager, standing, perhaps from the force of winter habit, with his back against the chimney-piece, and looking down upon the captain with an eye in every tooth and gum. "You have taken the liberty, you were going to say — though it's none" —

"Thank'ee kindly, my lad," returned the captain: "of coming here, on account of my friend Wal'r. Sol Gills, his uncle, is a man of science, and in science he may be considered a clipper; but he a'n't what I should altogether call a able seaman — not a man of practice. Wal'r is as trim a lad as ever stepped; but he's a little down by the head in one respect, and that is modesty. Now what I should wish to put to you," said the captain, lowering his voice, and speaking in a kind of confidential growl, "in a friendly way, entirely between you and me, and for my own private reckoning, till your head governor has wore round a bit, and I can come alongside of him, is this. — Is everything right and comfortable here, and is Wal'r out'ard bound with a pretty fair wind?"

"What do you think now, Captain Cuttle," returned Carker, gathering up his skirts and settling himself in his position. "*You* are a practical man; what do you think?"

The acuteness and significance of the captain's eye, as he cocked it in reply, no words short of those unutterable Chinese words before referred to could describe.

"Come!" said the captain, unspeakably encouraged, "what do you say? Am I right or wrong?"

So much had the captain expressed in his eye, emholdened and incited by Mr. Carker's smiling urbanity, that he felt himself in as fair a condition to put the question, as if he had expressed his sentiments with the utmost elaboration.

"Right," said Mr. Carker, "I have no doubt."

"Out'ard bound with fair weather, then, I say," cried Captain Cuttle.

Mr. Carker smiled assent.

"Wind right astarn, and plenty of it," pursued the captain.

Mr. Carker smiled assent again.

"Ay, ay!" said Captain Cuttle, greatly relieved and pleased. "I know'd how she headed, well enough; I told Wal'r so. Thank'ee, thank'ee."

"Gay has brilliant prospects," observed Mr. Carker, stretching his mouth wider yet; "all the world before him."

"All the world and his wife too, as the saying is," returned the delighted captain.

At the word "wife" (which he had uttered without design), the captain stopped, cocked his eye again, and putting the glazed hat on the top of the knobby stick, gave it a twirl, and looked sideways at his always smiling friend.

"I'd bet a gill of old Jamaica," said the captain, eying him attentively, "that I know what you're smiling at."

Mr. Carker took his cue, and smiled the more.

"It goes no farther?" said the captain, making a poke at the door with the knobby stick to assure himself that it was shut.

"Not an inch," said Mr. Carker.

"You're a-thinking of a capital F perhaps?" said the captain.

Mr. Carker didn't deny it.

"Anything about a L," said the captain, "or a O?"

Mr. Carker still smiled.

"Am I right again?" inquired the captain in a whisper, with the scarlet circle on his forehead, swelling in his triumphant joy.

Mr. Carker, in reply, still smiling, and now nodding assent, Captain Cuttle rose and squeezed him by the hand, assuring him, warmly, that they were on the same tack, and that as for him (Cuttle) he had laid his course that way all along. "He know'd her first," said the captain, with all the secrecy and gravity that the subject demanded, "in an uncommon manner — *you* remember his finding her in the street, when she was a'most a babby — he has liked her ever since, and she him, as much as two such youngsters can. We've always said, Sol Gills and me, that they was cut out for each other."

A cat, or a monkey, or a hyena, or a death's-head, could not have shown the captain more teeth at one time, than Mr. Carker showed him at this period of their interview.

"There's a general in-draught that way," observed the happy captain. "Wind and water sets in that direction, you see. Look at his being present t'other day!"

"Most favorable to his hopes," said Mr. Carker.

"Look at his being towed along in the wake of that day!" pursued the captain. "Why what can cut him adrift now?"

"Nothing," replied Mr. Carker.

"You're right again," returned the captain, giving his

hand another squeeze. "Nothing it is. So! steady! There's a son gone: pretty little creetur. A'n't there?"

"Yes, there's a son gone," said the acquiescent Carker.

"Pass the word, and there's another ready for you," quoth the captain. "Nevy of a scientific uncle! Nevy of Sol Gills! Wal'r! Wal'r, as is already in your business! And" — said the captain, rising gradually to a quotation he was preparing for a final burst, "who — comes from Sol Gills's daily, *to* your business, and your buzzums."

The captain's complacency as he gently jogged Mr. Carker with his elbow, on concluding each of the foregoing short sentences, could be surpassed by nothing but the exultation with which he fell back and eyed him when he had finished this brilliant display of eloquence and sagacity; his great blue waistcoat heaving with the throes of such a masterpiece, and his nose in a state of violent inflammation from the same cause.

"Am I right?" said the captain.

"Captain Cuttle," said Mr. Carker, bending down at the knees, for a moment, in an odd manner, as if he were falling together to hug the whole of himself at once, "your views in reference to Walter Gay are thoroughly and accurately right. I understand that we speak together in confidence."

"Honor!" interposed the captain, "not a word."

"To him or any one?" pursued the manager.

Captain Cuttle frowned and shook his head.

"But merely for your own satisfaction and guidance — and guidance, of course," repeated Mr. Carker, "with a view to your future proceedings."

"Thank'ee kindly, I am sure," said the captain, listening with great attention.

"I have no hesitation in saying, that's the fact. You have hit the probabilities exactly."

"And with regard to your head governor," said the captain, "why an interview had better come about nat'-ral between us. There's time enough."

Mr. Carker, with his mouth from ear to ear, repeated, "Time enough." Not articulating the words, but bowing his head affably, and forming them with his tongue and lips.

"And as I know now — it's what I always said — that Wal'r's in the way to make his fortune," said the captain.

"To make his fortune," Mr. Carker repeated, in the same dumb manner.

"And as Wal'r's going on this little voyage is, as I may say, in his day's work, and a part of his general expectations here," said the captain.

"Of his general expectations here," assented Mr. Carker, dumbly as before.

"Why, so long as I know that," pursued the captain, "there's no hurry, and my mind's at ease."

Mr. Carker still blandly assenting in the same voiceless manner, Captain Cuttle was strongly confirmed in his opinion that he was one of the most agreeable men he had ever met, and that even Mr. Dombey might improve himself on such a model. With great heartiness, therefore, the captain once again extended his enormous hand (not unlike an old block in color), and gave him a grip that left upon his smoother flesh a proof impression of the chinks and crevices with which the captain's palm was liberally tattooed.

"Farewell!" said the captain. "I a'n't a man of many words, but I take it very kind of you to be so

friendly, and above-board. You'll excuse me if I've been at all intruding, will you?" said the captain.

"Not at all," returned the other.

"Thank'ee. My berth a'n't very roomy," said the captain, turning back again, "but it's tolerably snug; and if you was to find yourself near Brig-place, number nine, at any time — will you make a note of it? — and would come up-stairs, without minding what was said by the person at the door, I should be proud to see you."

With that hospitable invitation, the captain said "Good day," and walked out and shut the door; leaving Mr. Carker still reclining against the chimney-piece. In whose sly look and watchful manner; in whose false mouth stretched but not laughing; in whose spotless cravat and very whiskers; even in whose silent passing of his soft hand over his white linen and his smooth face; there was something desperately cat-like.

The unconscious captain walked out in a state of self-glorification that imparted quite a new cut to the broad blue suit. "Stand by Ned!" said the captain to himself. "You've done a little business for the youngsters to-day, my lad!"

In his exultation, and in his familiarity, present and prospective, with the House, the captain, when he reached the outer office, could not refrain from rallying Mr. Perch a little, and asking him whether he thought everybody was still engaged. But not to be bitter on a man who had done his duty, the captain whispered in his ear, that if he felt disposed for a glass of rum-and-water, and would follow, he would be happy to bestow the same upon him.

Before leaving the premises, the captain, somewhat

to the astonishment of the clerks, looked round from a central point of view, and took a general survey of the office as part and parcel of a project in which his young friend was nearly interested. The strong-room excited his especial admiration; but, that he might not appear too particular, he limited himself to an approving glance, and, with a graceful recognition of the clerks as a body, that was full of politeness and patronage, passed out into court. Being promptly joined by Mr. Perch, he conveyed that gentleman to the tavern, and fulfilled his pledge — hastily, for Perch's time was precious.

"I'll give you for a toast," said the captain, "Wal'r!"

"Who?" submitted Mr. Perch.

"Wal'r!" repeated the captain, in a voice of thunder.

Mr. Perch, who seemed to remember having heard in infancy that there was once a poet of that name, made no objection; but he was much astonished at the captain's coming into the city to propose a poet; indeed if he had proposed to put a poet's statue up — say Shakspeare's for example — in a civic thoroughfare, he could hardly have done a greater outrage to Mr. Perch's experience. On the whole, he was such a mysterious and incomprehensible character, that Mr. Perch decided not to mention him to Mrs. Perch at all, in case of giving rise to any disagreeable consequences.

Mysterious and incomprehensible, the captain, with that lively sense upon him of having done a little business for the youngsters, remained all day, even to his most intimate friends; and but that Walter attributed his winks and grins, and other such pantomimic reliefs of himself, to his satisfaction in the success of their innocent deception upon old Sol Gills, he would assur-

edly have betrayed himself before night. As it was, however, he kept his own secret; and went home late from the instrument-maker's house, wearing the glazed hat so much on one side, and carrying such a beaming expression in his eyes, that Mrs. MacStinger (who might have been brought up at Doctor Blimber's, she was such a Roman matron) fortified herself, at the first glimpse of him, behind the open street-door, and refused to come out to the contemplation of her blessed infants, until he was securely lodged in his own room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

THERE is a hush through Mr. Dombey's house. Servants gliding up and down stairs rustle but make no sound of footsteps. They talk together constantly, and sit long at meals, making much of their meat and drink, and enjoying themselves after a grim unholy fashion. Mrs. Wickam, with her eyes suffused with tears, relates melancholy anecdotes; and tells them how she always said at Mrs. Pipchin's that it would be so, and takes more table-ale than usual, and is very sorry but sociable. Cook's state of mind is similar. She promises a little fry for supper, and struggles about equally against her feelings and the onions. Towlinson begins to think there's a fate in it, and wants to know if anybody can tell him of any good that ever came of living in a corner house. It seems to all of them as having happened a long time ago; though yet the child lies, calm and beautiful, upon his little bed.

After dark there come some visitors — noiseless visitors, with shoes of felt — who have been there before; and with them comes that bed of rest which is so strange a one for infant sleepers. All this time, the bereaved father has not been seen even by his attendant; for he sits in a corner of his own dark room when any one is there, and never seems to move at other times, except to

pace it to and fro. But in the morning it is whispered among the household that he was heard to go up-stairs in the dead night, and that he stayed there — in the room — until the sun was shining.

At the offices in the city, the ground-glass windows are made more dim by shutters; and while the lighted lamps upon the desks are half-extinguished by the day that wanders in, the day is half-extinguished by the lamps, and an unusual gloom prevails. There is not much business done. The clerks are indisposed to work; and they make assignations to eat chops in the afternoon, and go up the river. Perch, the messenger, stays long upon his errands; and finds himself in bars of public-houses, invited thither by friends, and holding forth on the uncertainty of human affairs. He goes home to Ball's Pond earlier in the evening than usual, and treats Mrs. Perch to a veal cutlet and Scotch ale. Mr. Carker the manager treats no one; neither is he treated; but alone in his own room he shows his teeth all day; and it would seem that there is something gone from Mr. Carker's path — some obstacle removed — which clears his way before him.

Now the rosy children living opposite to Mr. Dombey's house, peep from their nursery windows down into the street; for there are four black horses at his door, with feathers on their heads; and feathers tremble on the carriage that they draw; and these, and an array of men with scarfs and staves, attract a crowd. The juggler who was going to twirl the basin, puts his loose coat on again over his fine dress; and his trudging wife, one-sided with her heavy baby in her arms, loiters to see the company come out. But closer to her dingy breast she presses her baby, when the burden that is so easily

carried is borne forth; and the youngest of the rosy children at the high window opposite, needs no restraining hand to check her in her glee, when, pointing with her dimpled finger, she looks into her nurse's face, and asks "What's that!"

And now, among the knot of servants dressed in mourning, and the weeping women, Mr. Dombey passes through the hall to the other carriage that is waiting to receive him. He is not "brought down," these observers think, by sorrow and distress of mind. His walk is as erect, his bearing is as stiff as ever it has been. He hides his face behind no handkerchief, and looks before him. But that his face is something sunk and rigid, and is pale, it bears the same expression as of old. He takes his place within the carriage, and three other gentlemen follow. Then the grand funeral moves slowly down the street. The feathers are yet nodding in the distance, when the juggler has the basin spinning on a cane, and has the same crowd to admire it. But the juggler's wife is less alert than usual with the money-box, for a child's burial has set her thinking that perhaps the baby underneath her shabby shawl may not grow up to be a man, and wear a sky-blue fillet round his head, and salmon-colored worsted drawers, and tumble in the mud.

The feathers wind their gloomy way along the streets, and come within the sound of a church-bell. In this same church, the pretty boy received all that will soon be left of him on earth — a name. All of him that is dead, they lay there, near the perishable substance of his mother. It is well. Their ashes lie where Florence in her walks — oh lonely, lonely walks! — may pass them any day.

The service over, and the clergyman withdrawn, Mr. Dombey looks round, demanding in a low voice, whether the person who has been requested to attend to receive instructions for the tablet, is there?

Some one comes forward, and says "Yes."

Mr. Dombey intimates where he would have it placed; and shows him, with his hand upon the wall, the shape and size; and how it is to follow the memorial to the mother. Then, with his pencil, he writes out the inscription, and gives it to him: adding, "I wish to have it done at once."

"It shall be done immediately, sir."

"There is really nothing to inscribe but name and age, you see."

The man bows, glancing at the paper, but appears to hesitate. Mr. Dombey, not observing his hesitation, turns away, and leads towards the porch.

"I beg your pardon, sir;" a touch falls gently on his mourning cloak; "but as you wish it done immediately, and it may be put in hand when I get back" —

"Well?"

"Will you be so good as read it over again? I think there's a mistake."

"Where?"

The statuary gives him back the paper, and points out, with his pocket-rule, the words, "beloved and only child."

"It should be, 'son,' I think, sir?"

"You are right. Of course. Make the correction."

The father, with a hastier step, pursues his way to the coach. When the other three, who follow closely, take their seats, his face is hidden for the first time —shaded by his cloak. Nor do they see it any more

that day. He alights first, and passes immediately into his own room. The other mourners (who are only Mr. Chick, and two of the medical attendants) proceed upstairs to the drawing-room, to be received by Mrs. Chick and Miss Tox. And what the face is, in the shut-up chamber underneath: or what the thoughts are: what the heart is, what the contest or the suffering: no one knows.

The chief thing that they know, below-stairs, in the kitchen, is that "it seems like Sunday." They can hardly persuade themselves but that there is something unbecoming, if not wicked, in the conduct of the people out of doors, who pursue their ordinary occupations, and wear their every-day attire. It is quite a novelty to have the blinds up, and the shutters open: and they make themselves dismally comfortable over bottles of wine, which are freely broached as on a festival. They are much inclined to moralize. Mr. Towlinson proposes with a sigh, "Amendment to us all!" for which, as cook says with another sigh, "There's room enough, God knows." In the evening, Mrs. Chick and Miss Tox take to needlework again. In the evening also, Mr. Towlinson goes out to take the air, accompanied by the house-maid, who has not yet tried her mourning bonnet. They are very tender to each other at dusky street-corners, and Towlinson has visions of leading an altered and blameless existence as a serious green-grocer in Oxford Market.

There is sounder sleep and deeper rest in Mr. Dombey's house to-night, than there has been for many nights.

The morning sun awakens the old household, settled down once more in their old ways. The rosy children

opposite, run past with hoops. There is a splendid wedding in the church. The juggler's wife is active with the money-box in another quarter of the town. The mason sings and whistles as he chips out P-A-U-L in the marble slab before him.

And can it be that in a world so full and busy, the loss of one weak creature makes a void in any heart, so wide and deep that nothing but the width and depth of vast eternity can fill it up! Florence, in her innocent affliction might have answered, "Oh my brother, oh my dearly loved and loving brother! Only friend and companion of my slighted childhood! Could any less idea shed the light already dawning on your early grave, or give birth to the softened sorrow that is springing into life beneath this rain of tears!"

"My dear child," said Mrs. Chick, who held it as a duty incumbent on her, to improve the occasion, "when you are as old as I am" —

"Which will be the prime of life," observed Miss Tox.

"You will then," pursued Mrs. Chick, gently squeezing Miss Tox's hand in acknowledgment of her friendly remark, "you will then know that all grief is unavailing, and that it is our duty to submit."

"I will try, dear aunt. I do try," answered Florence, sobbing.

"I am glad to hear it," said Mrs. Chick, "because, my love, as our dear Miss Tox — of whose sound sense and excellent judgment, there cannot possibly be two opinions" —

"My dear Louisa, I shall really be proud, soon," said Miss Tox.

— "will tell you, and confirm by her experience," pur-

sued Mrs. Chick, "we are called upon on all occasions to make an effort. It is required of us. If any — my dear," turning to Miss Tox, "I want a word. Mis — Mis"—

"Demeanor?" suggested Miss Tox.

"No, no, no," said Mrs. Chick. "How can you! Goodness me, it's on the end of my tongue. Mis" —

"Placed affection?" suggested Miss Tox, timidly.

"Good gracious, Lucretia!" returned Mrs. Chick. "How very monstrous! Misanthrope, is the word I want. The idea! Misplaced affection! I say, if any misanthrope were to put, in my presence, the question 'Why were we born?' I should reply, 'to make an effort.'"

"Very good indeed," said Miss Tox, much impressed by the originality of the sentiment. "*Very* good."

"Unhappily," pursued Mrs. Chick, "we have a warning under our own eyes. We have but too much reason to suppose, my dear child, that if an effort had been made in time, in this family, a train of the most trying and distressing circumstances might have been avoided. Nothing shall ever persuade me," observed the good matron, with a resolute air, "but that if that effort had been made by poor dear Fanny, the poor dear darling child would at least have had a stronger constitution."

Mrs. Chick abandoned herself to her feelings for half a moment; but, as a practical illustration of her doctrine, brought herself up short, in the middle of a sob, and went on again.

"Therefore, Florence, pray let us see that you have some strength of mind, and do not selfishly aggravate the distress in which your poor papa is plunged."

"Dear aunt!" said Florence, kneeling quickly down

before her, that she might the better and more earnestly look into her face. "Tell me more about papa. Pray tell me about him! Is he quite heart-broken?"

Miss Tox was of a tender nature, and there was something in this appeal that moved her very much. Whether she saw in it a succession, on the part of the neglected child, to the affectionate concern so often expressed by her dead brother — or a love that sought to twine itself about the heart that had loved him, and that could not bear to be shut out from sympathy with such a sorrow, in such sad community of love and grief — or whether she only recognized the earnest and devoted spirit which, although discarded and repulsed, was wrung with tenderness long unreturned, and in the waste and solitude of this bereavement cried to him to seek a comfort in it, and to give some, by some small response — whatever may have been her understanding of it, it moved Miss Tox. For the moment she forgot the majesty of Mrs. Chick, and patting Florence hastily on the cheek, turned aside and suffered the tears to gush from her eyes, without waiting for a lead from that wise matron.

Mrs. Chick herself lost, for a moment, the presence of mind on which she so much prided herself; and remained mute, looking on the beautiful young face that had so long, so steadily, and patiently, been turned towards the little bed. But recovering her voice — which was synonymous with her presence of mind, indeed they were one and the same thing — she replied with dignity:

"Florence, my dear child, your poor papa is peculiar at times; and to question me about him, is to question me upon a subject which I really do not pretend to understand. I believe I have as much influence with your

papa as anybody has. Still, all I can say is, that he has said very little to me; and that I have only seen him once or twice for a minute at a time, and indeed have hardly seen him then, for his room has been dark. I have said to your papa 'Paul!'—that is the exact expression I used—'Paul! why do you not take something stimulating?' Your papa's reply has always been, 'Louisa, have the goodness to leave me. I want nothing. I am better by myself.' If I was to be put upon my oath to-morrow, Lucretia, before a magistrate," said Mrs. Chick, "I have no doubt I could venture to swear to those identical words."

Miss Tox expressed her admiration by saying, "My Louisa is ever methodical!"

"In short, Florence," resumed her aunt, "literally nothing has passed between your poor papa and myself, until to-day; when I mentioned to your papa that Sir Barnet and Lady Skettles had written exceedingly kind notes—our sweet boy! Lady Skettles loved him like a —— where's my pocket handkerchief!"

Miss Tox produced one.

"Exceedingly kind notes, proposing that you should visit them for change of scene. Mentioning to your papa that I thought Miss Tox and myself might now go home (in which he quite agreed), I inquired if he had any objection to your accepting this invitation. He said, 'No, Louisa, not the least!'"

Florence raised her tearful eyes.

"At the same time, if you would prefer staying here, Florence, to paying this visit at present, or to going home with me"—

"I should much prefer it, aunt," was the faint rejoinder.

"Why, then, child," said Mrs. Chick, "you can. It's a strange choice, I must say. But you always *were* strange. Anybody else at your time of life, and after what has passed — my dear Miss Tox, I have lost my pocket handkerchief again — would be glad to leave here, one would suppose."

"I should not like to feel," said Florence, "as if the house was avoided. I should not like to think that the — his — the rooms up-stairs were quite empty and dreary, aunt. I would rather stay here, for the present. Oh my brother! oh my brother!"

It was a natural emotion, not to be suppressed; and it would make way even between the fingers of the hands with which she covered up her face. The over-charged and heavy-laden breast must sometimes have that vent, or the poor wounded solitary heart within it would have fluttered like a bird with broken wings, and sunk down in the dust.

"Well, child!" said Mrs. Chick, after a pause. "I wouldn't on any account say anything unkind to you, and that I'm sure you know. You will remain here, then, and do exactly as you like. No one will interfere with you, Florence, or wish to interfere with you, I'm sure."

Florence shook her head in sad assent.

"I had no sooner begun to advise your poor papa that he really ought to seek some distraction and restoration in a temporary change," said Mrs. Chick, "than he told me he had already formed the intention of going into the country for a short time. I'm sure I hope he'll go very soon. He can't go too soon. But I suppose there are some arrangements connected with his private papers and so forth, consequent on the affliction that has tried

us all so much — I can't think what's become of mine: Lucretia, lend me yours, my dear — that may occupy him for one or two evenings in his own room. Your papa's a Dombey, child, if ever there was one," said Mrs. Chick, drying both her eyes at once with great care on opposite corners of Miss Tox's handkerchief. "He'll make an effort. There's no fear of him."

"Is there nothing, aunt," asked Florence, trembling, "I might do to" —

"Lord, my dear child," interposed Mrs. Chick, hastily, "what are you talking about? If your papa said to me — I have given you his exact words, 'Louisa, I want nothing; I am better by myself' — what do you think he'd say to you? You mustn't show yourself to him, child. Don't dream of such a thing."

"Aunt," said Florence, "I will go and lie down in my bed."

Mrs. Chick approved of this resolution, and dismissed her with a kiss. But Miss Tox, on a faint pretence of looking for the mislaid handkerchief, went up-stairs after her; and tried in a few stolen minutes to comfort her, in spite of great discouragement from Susan Nipper. For Miss Nipper, in her burning zeal, disparaged Miss Tox as a crocodile; yet her sympathy seemed genuine, and had at least the vantage-ground of disinterestedness — there was little favor to be won by it.

And was there no one nearer and dearer than Susan, to uphold the striving heart in its anguish? Was there no other neck to clasp; no other face to turn to? no one else to say a soothing word to such deep sorrow? Was Florence so alone in the bleak world that nothing else remained to her? Nothing. Stricken motherless and brotherless at once — for in the loss of little Paul,

that first and greatest loss fell heavily upon her — this was the only help she had. Oh, who can tell how much she needed help at first!

At first, when the house subsided into its accustomed course, and they had all gone away, except the servants, and her father shut up in his own rooms, Florence could do nothing but weep, and wander up and down, and sometimes, in a sudden pang of desolate remembrance, fly to her own chamber, wring her hands, lay her face down on her bed, and know no consolation: nothing but the bitterness and cruelty of grief. This commonly ensued upon the recognition of some spot or object very tenderly associated with him; and it made the miserable house, at first, a place of agony.

But it is not in the nature of pure love to burn so fiercely and unkindly long. The flame that in its grosser composition has the taint of earth, may prey upon the breast that gives it shelter; but the sacred fire from heaven is as gentle in the heart as when it rested on the heads of the assembled twelve, and showed each man his brother, brightened and unhurt. The image conjured up, there soon returned the placid face, the softened voice, the loving looks, the quiet trustfulness and peace; and Florence, though she wept still, wept more tranquilly, and courted the remembrance.

It was not very long before the golden water, dancing on the wall, in the old place at the old serene time, had her calm eyes fixed upon it as it ebbed away. It was not very long before that room again knew her, often; sitting there alone, as patient and as mild as when she had watched beside the little bed. When any sharp sense of its being empty smote upon her, she could kneel beside it, and pray God — it was the pouring out of her

full heart — to let one angel love her and remember her.

It was not very long, before, in the midst of the dismal house so wide and dreary, her low voice in the twilight, slowly, and stopping sometimes, touched the old air to which he had so often listened, with his drooping head upon her arm. And after that, and when it was quite dark, a little strain of music trembled in the room: so softly played and sung, that it was more like the mournful recollection of what she had done at his request on that last night, than the reality repeated. But it was repeated, often — very often, in the shadowy solitude; and broken murmurs of the strain still trembled on the keys, when the sweet voice was hushed in tears.

Thus she gained heart to look upon the work with which her fingers had been busy by his side on the seashore; and thus it was not very long before she took to it again — with something of a human love for it, as if it had been sentient and had known him; and, sitting in a window, near her mother's picture, in the unused room so long deserted, wore away the thoughtful hours.

Why did the dark eyes turn so often from this work to where the rosy children lived? They were not immediately suggestive of her loss; for they were all girls: four little sisters. But they were motherless like her — and had a father.

It was easy to know when he had gone out and was expected home, for the elder child was always dressed and waiting for him at the drawing-room window, or in the balcony; and when he appeared, her expectant face lighted up with joy, while the others at the high window, and always on the watch too, clapped their hands, and

drummed them on the sill, and called to him. The elder child would come down to the hall, and put her hand in his, and lead him up the stairs; and Florence would see her afterwards sitting by his side, or on his knee, or hanging coaxingly about his neck and talking to him: and though they were always gay together, he would often watch her face, as if he thought her like her mother that was dead. Florence would sometimes look no more at this, and bursting into tears would hide behind the curtain as if she were frightened, or would hurry from the window. Yet she could not help returning; and her work would soon fall unheeded from her hands again.

It was the house that had been empty, years ago. It had remained so for a long time. At last, and while she had been away from home, this family had taken it; and it was repaired and newly painted; and there were birds and flowers about it; and it looked very different from its old self. But she never thought of the house. The children and their father were all in all.

When he had dined, she could see them, through the open windows, go down with their governess or nurse, and cluster round the table; and in the still summer weather, the sound of their childish voices and clear laughter would come ringing across the street, into the drooping air of the room in which she sat. Then they would climb and clamber up-stairs with him, and romp about him on the sofa, or group themselves at his knee, a very nosegay of little faces, while he seemed to tell them some story. Or they would come running out into the balcony; and then Florence would hide herself quickly, lest it should check them in their joy, to see her in her black dress, sitting there alone.

The elder child remained with her father when the rest had gone away, and made his tea for him — happy little house-keeper she was then! — and sat conversing with him, sometimes at the window, sometimes in the room, until the candles came. He made her his companion, though she was some years younger than Florence; and she could be as staid and pleasantly demure, with her little book or work-box, as a woman. When they had candles, Florence from her own dark room was not afraid to look again. But when the time came for the child to say "Good-night, papa," and go to bed, Florence would sob and tremble as she raised her face to him, and could look no more.

Though still she would turn, again and again, before going to bed herself, from the simple air that had lulled him to rest so often, long ago, and from the other low soft broken strain of music, back to that house. But that she ever thought of it, or watched it, was a secret which she kept within her own young breast.

And did that breast of Florence — Florence, so ingenuous and true — so worthy of the love that he had borne her, and had whispered in his last faint words — whose guileless heart was mirrored in the beauty of her face, and breathed in every accent of her gentle voice — did that young breast hold any other secret? Yes. One more.

When no one in the house was stirring, and the lights were all extinguished, she would softly leave her own room, and with noiseless feet descend the staircase, and approach her father's door. Against it, scarcely breathing, she would rest her face and head, and press her lips, in the yearning of her love. She crouched upon the cold stone floor outside it, every night, to listen even

for his breath; and in her one absorbing wish to be allowed to show him some affection, to be a consolation to him, to win him over to the endurance of some tenderness from her, his solitary child, she would have knelt down at his feet, if she had dared, in humble supplication.

No one knew it. No one thought of it. The door was ever closed, and he shut up within. He went out once or twice, and it was said in the house that he was very soon going on his country journey; but he lived in those rooms, and lived alone, and never saw her, or inquired for her. Perhaps he did not even know that she was in the house.

One day, about a week after the funeral, Florence was sitting at her work, when Susan appeared, with a face half laughing and half crying, to announce a visitor.

"A visitor! To me, Susan!" said Florence, looking up in astonishment.

"Well, it *is* a wonder, a'n't it now Miss Floy," said Susan; "but I wish you had a many visitors, I do, indeed, for you'd be all the better for it, and it's my opinion that the sooner you and me goes even to them old Skettleses, miss, the better for both, I may not wish to live in crowds, Miss Floy, but still I'm not a oyster."

To do Miss Nipper justice, she spoke more for her young mistress than herself; and her face showed it.

"But the visitor, Susan," said Florence.

Susan, with an hysterical explosion that was as much a laugh as a sob, and as much a sob as a laugh, answered, —

"Mr. Toots!"

The smile that appeared on Florence's face passed from it in a moment, and her eyes filled with tears.

But at any rate it was a smile, and that gave great satisfaction to Miss Nipper.

"My own feelings exactly, Miss Floy," said Susan, putting her apron to her eyes, and shaking her head. "Immediately I see that Innocent in the hall, Miss Floy, I burst out laughing first, and then I choked."

Susan Nipper involuntarily proceeded to do the like again on the spot. In the mean time Mr. Toots, who had come up-stairs after her, all unconscious of the effect he produced, announced himself with his knuckles on the door, and walked in very briskly.

"How d'ye do, Miss Dombey?" said Mr. Toots. "I'm very well I thank you; how are you?"

Mr. Toots — than whom there were few better fellows in the world, though there may have been one or two brighter spirits — had laboriously invented this long burst of discourse with the view of relieving the feelings both of Florence and himself. But finding that he had run through his property, as it were, in an injudicious manner, by squandering the whole before taking a chair, or before Florence had uttered a word, or before he had well got in at the door, he deemed it advisable to begin again.

"How d'ye do, Miss Dombey?" said Mr. Toots. "I'm very well, I thank you; how are you?"

Florence gave him her hand, and said she was very well.

"I'm very well indeed," said Mr. Toots, taking a chair. "Very well indeed, I am. I don't remember," said Mr. Toots, after reflecting a little, "that I was ever better, thank you."

"It's very kind of you to come," said Florence, taking up her work. "I am very glad to see you."

Mr. Toots responded with a chuckle. Thinking that might be too lively, he corrected it with a sigh. Thinking that might be too melancholy, he corrected it with a chuckle. Not thoroughly pleasing himself with either mode of reply, he breathed hard.

"You were very kind to my dear brother," said Florence, obeying her own natural impulse to relieve him by saying so. "He often talked to me about you."

"Oh, it's of no consequence," said Mr. Toots hastily. "Warm, a'n't it?"

"It is beautiful weather," replied Florence.

"It agrees with *me!*" said Mr. Toots. "I don't think I ever was so well as I find myself at present, I'm obliged to you."

After stating this curious and unexpected fact, Mr. Toots fell into a deep well of silence.

"You have left Doctor Blimber's, I think?" said Florence, trying to help him out.

"I should hope so," returned Mr. Toots. And tumbled in again.

He remained at the bottom, apparently drowned, for at least ten minutes. At the expiration of that period, he suddenly floated, and said,

"Well! Good-morning, Miss Dombey."

"Are you going?" asked Florence, rising.

"I don't know, though. No, not just at present," said Mr. Toots, sitting down again, most unexpectedly. "The fact is — I say, Miss Dombey!"

"Don't be afraid to speak to me," said Florence, with a quiet smile, "I should be very glad if you would talk about my brother."

"Would you, though," retorted Mr. Toots, with sym-

pathy in every fibre of his otherwise expressionless face. "Poor Dombey! I'm sure I never thought that Burgess & Co. — fashionable tailors (but very dear), that we used to talk about — would make this suit of clothes for such a purpose." Mr. Toots was dressed in mourning. "Poor Dombey! I say! Miss Dombey!" blubbered Toots.

"Yes," said Florence.

"There's a friend he took to very much at last. I thought you'd like to have him, perhaps, as a sort of keepsake. You remember his remembering Diogenes?"

"Oh yes! oh yes!" cried Florence.

"Poor Dombey! So do I," said Mr. Toots.

Mr. Toots, seeing Florence in tears, had great difficulty in getting beyond this point, and had nearly tumbled into the well again. But a chuckle saved him on the brink.

"I say," he proceeded, "Miss Dombey! I could have had him stolen for ten shillings, if they hadn't given him up; and I would: but they were glad to get rid of him, I think. If you'd like to have him, he's at the door. I brought him on purpose for you. He a'n't a lady's dog, you know," said Mr. Toots, "but you won't mind that, will you?"

In fact, Diogenes was at that moment, as they presently ascertained from looking down into the street, staring through the window of a hackney cabriolet, into which, for conveyance to that spot, he had been ensnared, on a false pretence of rats among the straw. Sooth to say, he was as unlike a lady's dog as dog might be; and in his gruff anxiety to get out presented an appearance sufficiently unpromising, as he gave short yelps out of one side of his mouth, and overbalancing himself

by the intensity of every one of those efforts, tumbled down into the straw, and then sprung panting up again, putting out his tongue, as if he had come express to a dispensary to be examined for his health.

But though Diogenes was as ridiculous a dog as one would meet with on a summer's day; a blundering, ill-favored, clumsy, bullet-headed dog, continually acting on a wrong idea that there was an enemy in the neighborhood, whom it was meritorious to bark at; and though he was far from good-tempered, and certainly was not clever, and had hair all over his eyes, and a comic nose, and an inconsistent tail, and a gruff voice; he was dearer to Florence, in virtue of that parting remembrance of him, and that request that he might be taken care of, than the most valuable and beautiful of his kind. So dear, indeed, was this same ugly Diogenes, and so welcome to her, that she took the jewelled hand of Mr. Toots and kissed it in her gratitude. And when Diogenes, released, came tearing up the stairs and bouncing into the room (such a business as there was first, to get him out of the cabriolet!), dived under all the furniture, and wound a long iron chain, that dangled from his neck, round legs of chairs and tables, and then tugged at it until his eyes became unnaturally visible, in consequence of their nearly starting out of his head; and when he growled at Mr. Toots, who affected familiarity; and went pell-mell at Towlinson, morally convinced that he was the enemy whom he had barked at round the corner all his life and had never seen yet: Florence was as pleased with him as if he had been a miracle of discretion.

Mr. Toots was so overjoyed by the success of his present, and was so delighted to see Florence bending

down over Diogenes, smoothing his coarse back with her little delicate hand — Diogenes graciously allowing it from the first moment of their acquaintance — that he felt it difficult to take leave, and would, no doubt, have been a much longer time in making up his mind to do so, if he had not been assisted by Diogenes himself, who suddenly took it into his head to bay Mr. Toots, and to make short runs at him with his mouth open. Not exactly seeing his way to the end of these demonstrations, and sensible that they placed the pantaloons constructed by the art of Burgess & Co. in jeopardy, Mr. Toots, with chuckles, lapsed out at the door: by which, after looking in again two or three times, without any object at all, and being on each occasion greeted with a fresh run from Diogenes, he finally took himself off and got away.

"Come, then, Di! Dear Di! Make friends with your new mistress. Let us love each other Di!" said Florence, fondling his shaggy head. And Di, the rough and gruff, as if his hairy hide were pervious to the tear that dropped upon it, and his dog's heart melted as it fell, put his nose up to her face, and swore fidelity.

Diogenes the man did not speak plainer to Alexander the Great than Diogenes the dog spoke to Florence. He subscribed to the offer of his little mistress cheerfully, and devoted himself to her service. A banquet was immediately provided for him in a corner; and when he had eaten and drunk his fill, he went to the window where Florence was sitting, looking on, rose up on his hind legs, with his awkward fore paws on her shoulders, licked her face and hands, nestled his great head against her heart, and wagged his tail till he was

tired. Finally, Diogenes coiled himself up at her feet and went to sleep.

Although Miss Nipper was nervous in regard of dogs, and felt it necessary to come into the room with her skirts carefully collected about her, as if she were crossing a brook on stepping-stones; also to utter little screams and stand up on chairs when Diogenes stretched himself; she was in her own manner affected by the kindness of Mr. Toots, and could not see Florence so alive to the attachment and society of this rude friend of little Paul's, without some mental comments thereupon that brought the water to her eyes. Mr. Dombey, as a part of her reflections, may have been, in the association of ideas, connected with the dog; but, at any rate, after observing Diogenes and his mistress all the evening, and after exerting herself with much good-will to provide Diogenes a bed in an antechamber outside his mistress's door, she said hurriedly to Florence, before leaving her for the night:

"Your pa's a-going off, Miss Floy, to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow morning, Susan?"

"Yes, miss; that's the orders. Early."

"Do you know," asked Florence, without looking at her, "where papa is going, Susan?"

"Not exactly, miss. He's going to meet that precious major first, and I must say if I was acquainted with any major myself (which Heavens forbid), it shouldn't be a blue one!"

"Hush, Susan!" urged Florence gently.

"Well, Miss Floy," returned Miss Nipper, who was full of burning indignation, and minded her stops even less than usual. "I can't help it, blue he is, and while I

was a Christian, although humble, I would have natural-colored friends, or none."

It appeared from what she added and had gleaned down-stairs, that Mrs. Chick had proposed the major for Mr. Dombey's companion, and that Mr. Dombey, after some hesitation, had invited him.

"Talk of *him* being a change, indeed!" observed Miss Nipper to herself with boundless contempt. "If he's a change give me a constancy."

"Good-night, Susan," said Florence.

"Good-night, my darling dear Miss Floy."

Her tone of commiseration smote the chord so often roughly touched, but never listened to while she or any one looked on. Florence left alone, laid her head upon her hand, and pressing the other over her swelling heart, held free communication with her sorrows.

It was a wet night; and the melancholy rain fell pattering and dropping with a wearied sound. A sluggish wind was blowing, and went moaning round the house, as if it were in pain or grief. A shrill noise quivered through the trees. While she sat weeping, it grew late, and dreary midnight tolled out from the steeples.

Florence was little more than a child in years — not yet fourteen — and the loneliness and gloom of such an hour in the great house where Death had lately made its own tremendous devastation, might have set an older fancy brooding on vague terrors. But her innocent imagination was too full of one theme to admit them. Nothing wandered in her thoughts but love — a wandering love, indeed, and cast away — but turning always to her father.

There was nothing in the dropping of the rain, the moaning of the wind, the shuddering of the trees, the

striking of the solemn clocks, that shook this one thought, or diminished its interest. Her recollections of the dear dead boy — and they were never absent — were itself; the same thing. And oh, to be shut out: to be so lost: never to have looked into her father's face or touched him, since that hour!

She could not go to bed, poor child, and never had gone yet, since then, without making her nightly pilgrimage to his door. It would have been a strange sad sight, to see her now, stealing lightly down the stairs through the thick gloom, and stopping at it with a beating heart, and blinded eyes, and hair that fell down loosely and unthought of: and touching it outside with her wet cheek. But the night covered it, and no one knew.

The moment that she touched the door on this night, Florence found that it was open. For the first time it stood open, though by but a hair's-breadth: and there was a light within. The first impulse of the timid child — and she yielded to it — was to retire swiftly. Her next, to go back, and to enter; and this second impulse held her in irresolution on the staircase.

In its standing open, even by so much as that chink, there seemed to be hope. There was encouragement in seeing a ray of light from within, stealing through the dark stern door-way, and falling in a thread upon the marble floor. She turned back, hardly knowing what she did, but urged on by the love within her, and the trial they had undergone together, but not shared: and with her hands a little raised and trembling, glided in.

Her father sat at his old table in the middle room. He had been arranging some papers, and destroying others, and the latter lay in fragile ruins before him. The rain dripped heavily upon the glass panes in the

outer room, where he had so often watched poor Paul, a baby; and the low complainings of the wind were heard without.

But not by him. He sat with his eyes fixed on the table, so immersed in thought, that a far heavier tread than the light foot of his child could make, might have failed to rouse him. His face was turned towards her. By the waning lamp, and at that haggard hour, it looked worn and dejected; and in the utter loneliness surrounding him, there was an appeal to Florence that struck home.

"Papa! papa! Speak to me, dear papa!"

He started at her voice, and leaped up from his seat. She was close before him with extended arms, but he fell back.

"What is the matter?" he said, sternly. "Why do you come here? What has frightened you?"

If anything had frightened her, it was the face he turned upon her. The glowing love within the breast of his young daughter froze before it, and she stood and looked at him as if stricken into stone.

There was not one touch of tenderness or pity in it. There was not one gleam of interest, parental recognition, or relenting in it. There was a change in it, but not of that kind. The old indifference and cold constraint had given place to something: what, she never thought and did not dare to think, and yet she felt it in its force, and knew it well without a name: that as it looked upon her, seemed to cast a shadow on her head.

Did he see before him the successful rival of his son, in health and life? Did he look upon his own successful rival in that son's affection? Did a mad jealousy and withered pride, poison sweet remembrances that

should have endeared and made her precious to him? Could it be possible that it was gall to him to look upon her in her beauty and her promise: thinking of his infant boy!

Florence had no such thoughts. But love is quick to know when it is spurned and hopeless: and hope died out of hers, as she stood looking in her father's face.

"I ask you, Florence, are you frightened? Is there anything the matter, that you come here?"

"I came papa"—

"Against my wishes. Why?"

She saw he knew why: it was written broadly on his face: and dropped her head upon her hands with one prolonged low cry.

Let him remember it in that room, years to come. It has faded from the air, before he breaks the silence. It may pass as quickly from his brain, as he believes, but it is there. Let him remember it in that room, years to come!

He took her by the arm. His hand was cold, and loose, and scarcely closed upon her.

"You are tired, I dare say," he said, taking up the light, and leading her towards the door, "and want rest. We all want rest. Go Florence. You have been dreaming."

The dream she had had, was over then, God help her! and she felt that it could never more come back.

"I will remain here to light you up the stairs. The whole house is yours, above there," said her father, slowly. "You are its mistress now. Good-night!"

Still covering her face, she sobbed, and answered "Good-night, dear papa," and silently ascended. Once she looked back as if she would have returned to him,

but for fear. It was a momentary thought, too hopeless to encourage; and her father stood there with the light — hard, unresponsive, motionless — until the fluttering dress of his fair child was lost in the darkness.

Let him remember it in that room, years to come. The rain that falls upon the roof: the wind that mourns outside the door: may have foreknowledge in their melancholy sound. Let him remember it in that room, years to come!

The last time he had watched her, from the same place, winding up those stairs, she had had her brother in her arms. It did not move his heart towards her now, it steeled it: but he went into his room, and locked his door, and sat down in his chair, and cried for his lost boy.

Diogenes was broad awake upon his post, and waiting for his little mistress.

"Oh Di! Oh dear Di! Love me for his sake!"

Diogenes already loved her for her own, and didn't care how much he showed it. So he made himself vastly ridiculous by performing a variety of uncouth bounces in the antechamber, and concluded, when poor Florence was at last asleep, and dreaming of the rosy children opposite, by scratching open her bedroom door: rolling up his bed into a pillow: lying down on the boards at the full length of his tether, with his head towards her: and looking lazily at her, upside down, out of the tops of his eyes, until from winking and winking he fell asleep himself, and dreamed, with gruff barks, of his enemy.

CHAPTER XIX.

WALTER GOES AWAY.

The Wooden Midshipman at the Instrument-maker's door, like the hard-hearted little midshipman he was, remained supremely indifferent to Walter's going away, even when the very last day of his sojourn in the back-parlor was on the decline. With his quadrant at his round black knob of an eye, and his figure in its old attitude of indomitable alacrity, the midshipman displayed his elfin small-clothes to the best advantage, and, absorbed in scientific pursuits, had no sympathy with worldly concerns. He was so far the creature of circumstances, that a dry day covered him with dust, and a misty day peppered him with little bits of soot, and a wet day brightened up his tarnished uniform for a moment, and a very hot day blistered him; but otherwise he was a callous, obdurate, conceited midshipman, intent on his own discoveries, and caring as little for what went on about him, terrestrially, as Archimedes at the taking of Syracuse.

Such a midshipman he seemed to be, at least, in the then position of domestic affairs. Walter eyed him kindly many a time in passing in and out; and poor old Sol, when Walter was not there, would come and lean against the door-post, resting his weary wig as near the shoe-buckles of the guardian genius of his trade and shop

as he could. But no fierce idol with a mouth from ear to ear, and a murderous visage made of parrot's feathers, was ever more indifferent to the appeals of its savage votaries, than was the midshipman to these marks of attachment.

Walter's heart felt heavy as he looked round his old bedroom, up among the parapets and chimney-pots, and thought that one more night already darkening would close his acquaintance with it, perhaps forever. Dismantled of his little stock of books and pictures, it looked coldly and reproachfully on him for his desertion, and had already a foreshadowing upon it of its coming strangeness. "A few hours more," thought Walter, "and no dream I ever had here when I was a schoolboy will be so little mine as this old room. The dream may come back in my sleep, and I may return waking to this place, it may be: but the dream at least will serve no other master, and the room may have a score, and every one of them may change, neglect, misuse it."

But his uncle was not to be left alone in the little back-parlor, where he was then sitting by himself; for Captain Cuttle, considerate in his roughness, stayed away against his will, purposely that they should have some talk together unobserved: so Walter, newly returned home from his last day's bustle, descended briskly to bear him company.

"Uncle," he said gayly, laying his hand upon the old man's shoulders, "what shall I send you home from Barbadoes?"

"Hope, my dear Wally. Hope that we shall meet again, on this side of the grave. Send me as much of that as you can."

"So I will, uncle: I have enough and to spare, and

I'll not be chary of it! And as to lively turtles, and limes for Captain Cuttle's punch, and preserves for you on Sundays, and all that sort of thing, why I'll send you ship-loads, uncle: when I'm rich enough."

Old Sol wiped his spectacles, and faintly smiled.

"That's right, uncle!" cried Walter, merrily, and clapping him half a dozen times more upon the shoulder. "You cheer up me! I'll cheer up you! We'll be as gay as larks to-morrow morning, uncle, and we'll fly as high! As to my anticipations, they are singing out of sight now."

"Wally, my dear boy," returned the old man, "I'll do my best, I'll do my best."

"And *your* best, uncle," said Walter, with his pleasant laugh, "is the best best that I know. You'll not forget what you're to send *me*, uncle?"

"No, Wally, no," replied the old man; "everything I hear about Miss Dombey, now that she is left alone, poor lamb, I'll write. I fear it won't be much though, Wally."

"Why, I'll tell you what, uncle," said Walter, after a moment's hesitation, "I have just been up there."

"Ay, ay, ay?" murmured the old man, raising his eyebrows, and his spectacles with them.

"Not to see *her*," said Walter, "though I could have seen her, I dare say, if I had asked, Mr. Dombey being out of town: but to say a parting word to Susan. I thought I might venture to do that, you know, under the circumstances, and remembering when I saw Miss Dombey last."

"Yes, my boy, yes," replied his uncle, rousing himself from a temporary abstraction.

"So I saw her," pursued Walter. "Susan, I mean: and I told her I was off and away to-morrow. And I said, uncle, that you had always had an interest in

Miss Dombey since that night when she was here, and always wished her well and happy, and always would be proud and glad to serve her in the least: I thought I might say that, you know, under the circumstances. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, my boy, yes," replied his uncle, in the tone as before.

"And I added," pursued Walter, "that if she — Susan, I mean — could ever let you know, either through herself or Mrs. Richards, or anybody else who might be coming this way, that Miss Dombey *was* well and happy, you would take it very kindly, and would write so much to me, and I should take it very kindly too. There! Upon my word, uncle," said Walter, "I scarcely slept all last night through thinking of doing this; and could not make up my mind when I was out, whether to do it or not; and yet I am sure it is the true feeling of my heart, and I should have been quite miserable afterwards if I had not relieved it."

His honest voice and manner corroborated what he said, and quite established its ingenuousness.

"So, if you ever see her, uncle," said Walter, "I mean Miss Dombey now — and perhaps you may, who knows! — tell her how much I felt for her; how much I used to think of her when I was here; how I spoke of her, with the tears in my eyes, uncle, on this last night before I went away. Tell her that I said I never could forget her gentle manner, or her beautiful face, or her sweet kind disposition that was better than all. And as I didn't take them from a woman's feet, or a young lady's: only a little innocent child's," said Walter: "tell her if you don't mind, uncle, that I kept those shoes — she'll remember how often they fell off, that

night — and took them away with me as a remembrance!"

They were at that very moment going out at the door in one of Walter's trunks. A porter carrying off his baggage on a truck for shipment at the docks on board the Son and Heir, had got possession of them: and wheeled them away under the very eye of the insensible Midshipman before their owner had well finished speaking.

But that ancient mariner might have been excused his insensibility to the treasure as it rolled away. For, under his eye at the same moment, accurately within his range of observation, coming full into the sphere of his startled and intensely wide-awake look-out, were Florence and Susan Nipper: Florence looking up into his face half timidly, and receiving the whole shock of his wooden ogling!

More than this, they passed into the shop, and passed in at the parlor-door before they were observed by anybody but the Midshipman. And Walter, having his back to the door, would have known nothing of their apparition even then, but for seeing his uncle spring out of his own chair, and nearly tumble over another.

"Why uncle!" exclaimed Walter. "What's the matter?"

Old Solomon replied, "Miss Dombey!"

"Is it possible!" cried Walter, looking round and starting up in his turn. "Here!"

Why it was so possible and so actual, that, while the words were on his lips, Florence hurried past him; took Uncle Sol's snuff-colored lappels, one in each hand; kissed him on the cheek; and turning, gave her hand to Walter with a simple truth and ear-

nestness that was her own, and no one else's in the world!

"Going away, Walter!" said Florence.

"Yes, Miss Dombey," he replied, but not so hopefully as he endeavored: "I have a voyage before me."

"And your uncle," said Florence, looking back at Solomon. "He is sorry you are going, I am sure. Ah! I see he is! Dear Walter, I am very sorry too."

"Goodness knows," exclaimed Miss Nipper, "there's a many we could spare instead, if numbers is a object, Mrs. Pipchin as a overseer would come cheap at her weight in gold, and if a knowledge of black slavery should be required, them Blimbers is the very people for the sitiwation."

With that Miss Nipper untied her bonnet-strings, and after looking vacantly for some moments into a little black tea-pot that was set forth with the usual homely service, on the table, shook her head and a tin canister, and began unasked to make the tea.

In the mean time Florence had turned again to the Instrument-maker, who was as full of admiration as surprise. "So grown!" said old Sol. "So improved! And yet not altered! Just the same!"

"Indeed!" said Florence.

"Ye — yes," returned old Sol, rubbing his hands slowly, and considering the matter half aloud, as something pensive in the bright eyes looking at him arrested his attention. "Yes, that expression was in the younger face, too!"

"You remember me," said Florence with a smile, "and what a little creature I was then?"

"My dear young lady," returned the Instrument-maker, "how could I forget you, often as I have thought

of you and heard of you since! At the very moment, indeed, when you came in, Wally was talking about you to me, and leaving messages for you, and" —

"Was he?" said Florence. "Thank you, Walter! Oh thank you, Walter! I was afraid you might be going away and hardly thinking of me;" and again she gave him her little hand so freely and so faithfully that Walter held it for some moments in his own, and could not bear to let it go.

Yet Walter did not hold it as he might have held it once, nor did its touch awaken those old day-dreams of his boyhood that had floated past him sometimes even lately, and confused him with their indistinct and broken shapes. The purity and innocence of her endearing manner, and its perfect trustfulness, and the undisguised regard for him that lay so deeply seated in her constant eyes, and glowed upon her fair face through the smile that shaded — for alas! it was a smile too sad to brighten — it, were not of their romantic race. They brought back to his thoughts the early death-bed he had seen her tending, and the love the child had borne her; and on the wings of such remembrances she seemed to rise up, far above his idle fancies, into clearer and serener air.

"I — I am afraid I must call you Walter's uncle, sir," said Florence to the old man, "if you'll let me."

"My dear young lady," cried old Sol. "Let you! Good gracious!"

"We always knew you by that name, and talked of you," said Florence, glancing round and sighing gently. "The nice old parlor! Just the same! How well I recollect it!"

Old Sol looked first at her, then at his nephew, and

then rubbed his hands, and rubbed his spectacles, and said below his breath, "Ah! time, time, time!"

There was a short silence; during which Susan Nipper skilfully impounded two extra cups and saucers from the cupboard, and awaited the drawing of the tea with a thoughtful air.

"I want to tell Walter's uncle," said Florence, laying her hand timidly upon the old man's as it rested on the table, to bespeak his attention, "something that I am anxious about. He is going to be left alone, and if he will allow me — not to take Walter's place, for that I couldn't do, but to be his true friend and help him if I ever can while Walter is away, I shall be very much obliged to him indeed. Will you? May I, Walter's uncle?"

The Instrument-maker, without speaking, put her hand to his lips, and Susan Nipper, leaning back with her arms crossed, in the chair of presidency into which she had voted herself, bit one end of her bonnet-strings, and heaved a gentle sigh as she looked up at the skylight.

"You will let me come to see you," said Florence, "when I can; and you will tell me everything about yourself and Walter; and you will have no secrets from Susan when she comes and I do not, but will confide in us, and trust us, and rely upon us. And you'll try to let us be a comfort to you? Will you, Walter's uncle?"

The sweet face looking into his, the gently pleading eyes, the soft voice, and the light touch on his arm, made the more winning by a child's respect and honor for his age, that gave to all an air of graceful doubt and modest hesitation — these, and her natural earnestness, so overcame the poor old Instrument-maker, that he only answered:

"Wally! say a word for me, my dear. I'm very grateful."

"No, Walter," returned Florence with her quiet smile. "Say nothing for him, if you please. I understand him very well, and we must learn to talk together without you, dear Walter."

The regretful tone in which she said these latter words, touched Walter more than all the rest.

"Miss Florence," he replied, with an effort to recover the cheerful manner he had preserved while talking with his uncle, "I know no more than my uncle, what to say in acknowledgment of such kindness, I am sure. But what could I say, after all, if I had the power of talking for an hour, except that it is like you?"

Susan Nipper began upon a new part of her bonnet-string, and nodded at the skylight, in approval of the sentiment expressed.

"Oh! but Walter," said Florence, "there is something that I wish to say to you before you go away, and you must call me Florence if you please, and not speak like a stranger."

"Like a stranger!" returned Walter. "No. I couldn't speak so. I am sure, at least, I couldn't feel like one."

"Ay, but that is not enough, and is not what I mean. For Walter," added Florence, bursting into tears, "he liked you very much, and said before he died that he was fond of you, and said 'Remember Walter!' and if you'll be a brother to me Walter, now that he is gone and I have none on earth, I'll be your sister all my life, and think of you like one wherever we may be! This is what I wished to say, dear Walter, but I cannot say it as I would, because my heart is full."

And in its fulness and its sweet simplicity, she held out both her hands to him. Walter taking them, stooped down and touched the tearful face that neither shrunk nor turned away, nor reddened as he did so, but looked up at him with confidence and truth. In that one moment, every shadow of doubt or agitation passed away from Walter's soul. It seemed to him that he responded to her innocent appeal, beside the dead child's bed: and, in the solemn presence he had seen there, pledged himself to cherish and protect her very image, in his banishment, with brotherly regard; to garner up her simple faith, inviolate; and hold himself degraded if he breathed upon it any thought that was not in her own breast when she gave it to him.

Susan Nipper, who had bitten both her bonnet-strings at once, and imparted a great deal of private emotion to the skylight, during this transaction, now changed the subject by inquiring who took milk and who took sugar; and being enlightened on these points, poured out the tea. They all four gathered socially about the little table, and took tea under that young lady's active superintendence; and the presence of Florence in the back-parlor, brightened the Tartar frigate on the wall.

Half an hour ago, Walter, for his life, would have hardly called her by her name. But he could do so now when she entreated him. He could think of her being there, without a lurking misgiving that it would have been better if she had not come. He could calmly think how beautiful she was, how full of promise, what a home some happy man would find in such a heart one day. He could reflect upon his own place in that heart, with pride; and with a brave determination, if not to deserve it — he still thought that far above him — never to deserve it less.

Some fairy influence must surely have hovered round the hands of Susan Nipper when she made the tea, engendering the tranquil air that reigned in the back-parlor during its discussion. Some counter-influence must surely have hovered round the hands of Uncle Sol's chronometer, and moved them faster than the Tartar frigate ever went before the wind. Be this as it may, the visitors had a coach in waiting at a quiet corner not far off; and the chronometer, on being incidentally referred to, gave such a positive opinion that it had been waiting a long time, that it was impossible to doubt the fact, especially when stated on such unimpeachable authority. If Uncle Sol had been going to be hanged by his own time, he never would have allowed that the chronometer was too fast, by the least fraction of a second.

Florence at parting recapitulated to the old man all that she had said before, and bound him to their compact. Uncle Sol attended her lovingly to the legs of the wooden Midshipman, and there resigned her to Walter, who was ready to escort her and Susan Nipper to the coach.

"Walter," said Florence by the way, "I have been afraid to ask before your uncle. Do you think you will be absent very long?"

"Indeed," said Walter, "I don't know. I fear so. Mr. Dombey signified as much, I thought, when he appointed me."

"Is it a favor, Walter?" inquired Florence, after a moment's hesitation, and looking anxiously in his face.

"The appointment?" returned Walter.

"Yes."

Walter would have given anything to have answered in the affirmative, but his face answered before his lips

could, and Florence was too attentive to it not to understand its reply.

"I am afraid you have scarcely been a favorite with papa," she said, timidly.

"There is no reason," replied Walter, smiling, "why I should be."

"No reason, Walter!"

"There *was* no reason," said Walter, understanding what she meant. "There are many people employed in the house. Between Mr. Dombey and a young man like me, there's a wide space of separation. If I do my duty, I do what I ought, and do no more than all the rest."

Had Florence any misgiving of which she was hardly conscious: any misgiving that had sprung into an indistinct and undefined existence since that recent night when she had gone down to her father's room: that Walter's accidental interest in her, and early knowledge of her, might have involved him in that powerful displeasure and dislike? Had Walter any such idea, or any sudden thought that it was in her mind at that moment? Neither of them hinted at it. Neither of them spoke at all, for some short time. Susan, walking on the other side of Walter, eyed them both sharply; and certainly Miss Nipper's thoughts travelled in that direction, and very confidently too.

"You may come back very soon," said Florence, "perhaps, Walter."

"I *may* come back," said Walter, "an old man, and find you an old lady. But I hope for better things."

"Papa," said Florence, after a moment, "will — will recover from his grief, and — speak more freely to me one day, perhaps; and if he should, I will tell him how

much I wish to see you back again, and ask him to recall you for my sake."

There was a touching modulation in these words about her father that Walter understood too well.

The coach being close at hand, he would have left her without speaking, for now he felt what parting was; but Florence held his hand when she was seated, and then he found there was a little packet in her own.

"Walter," she said, looking full upon him with her affectionate eyes, "like you, I hope for better things. I will pray for them, and believe that they will arrive. I made this little gift for Paul. Pray take it with my love, and do not look at it until you are gone away. And now, God bless you, Walter! never forget me. You are my brother, dear!"

He was glad that Susan Nipper came between them, or he might have left her with a sorrowful remembrance of him. He was glad too that she did not look out of the coach again, but waved the little hand to him instead, as long as he could see it.

In spite of her request, he could not help opening the packet that night when he went to bed. It was a little purse: and there was money in it.

Bright rose the sun next morning, from his absence in strange countries, and up rose Walter with it to receive the captain, who was already at the door: having turned out earlier than was necessary, in order to get under weigh while Mrs. MacStinger was yet slumbering. The captain pretended to be in tip-top spirits, and brought a very smoky tongue in one of the pockets of the broad blue coat for breakfast.

"And Wal'r," said the captain, when they took their seats at table, "if your uncle's the man I think him, he'll

bring out the last bottle of *the* Madeira on the present occasion."

"No, no, Ned," returned the old man. "No! That shall be opened when Walter comes home again."

"Well said!" cried the captain. "Hear him!"

"There it lies," said Sol Gills, "down in the little cellar, covered with dirt and cobwebs. There may be dirt and cobwebs over you and me perhaps, Ned, before it sees the light."

"Hear him!" cried the captain. "Good morality! Wal'r my lad. Train up a fig-tree in the way it should go, and when you are old sit under the shade on it. Overhaul the — Well," said the captain on second thoughts, "I a'n't quite certain where that's to be found; but when found, make a note of. Sol Gills, heave ahead again!"

"But there, or somewhere, it shall lie, Ned, until Wally comes back to claim it," said the old man. "That's all I meant to say."

"And well said too," returned the captain; "and if we three don't crack that bottle in company, I'll give you two leave to drink my allowance!"

Notwithstanding the captain's excessive joviality, he made but a poor hand at the smoky tongue, though he tried very hard, when anybody looked at him, to appear as if he were eating with a vast appetite. He was terribly afraid, likewise, of being left alone with either uncle or nephew; appearing to consider that his only chance of safety as to keeping up appearances, was in their being always three together. This terror on the part of the captain, reduced him to such ingenious evasions as running to the door, when Solomon went to put his coat on, under pretence of having seen an extraordinary

hackney-coach pass: and darting out into the road when Walter went up-stairs to take leave of the lodgers, on a feint of smelling fire in a neighboring chimney. These artifices Captain Cuttle deemed inscrutable by any uninspired observer.

Walter was coming down from his parting expedition up-stairs, and was crossing the shop to go back to the little parlor, when he saw a faded face he knew, looking in at the door, and darted towards it.

"Mr. Carker!" cried Walter, pressing the hand of John Carker the Junior. "Pray come in! This is kind of you, to be here so early to say good-by to me. You knew how glad it would make me to shake hands with you, once, before going away. I cannot say how glad I am to have this opportunity. Pray come in."

"It is not likely that we may ever meet again, Walter," returned the other, gently resisting his invitation, "and I am glad of this opportunity too. I may venture to speak to you, and to take you by the hand, on the eve of separation. I shall not have to resist your frank approaches, Walter, any more."

There was a melancholy in his smile as he said it, that showed he had found some company and friendship for his thoughts even in that.

"Ah, Mr. Carker!" returned Walter. "Why did you resist them? You could have done me nothing but good, I am very sure."

He shook his head. "If there were any good," he said, "I could do on this earth, I would do it, Walter, for you. The sight of you from day to day, has been at once happiness and remorse to me. But the pleasure has outweighed the pain. I know that, now, by knowing what I lose."

"Come in, Mr. Carker, and make acquaintance with my good old uncle," urged Walter. "I have often talked to him about you, and he will be glad to tell you all he hears from me. I have not," said Walter, noticing his hesitation, and speaking with embarrassment himself: "I have not told him anything about our last conversation, Mr. Carker; not even him, believe me."

The gray Junior pressed his hand, and tears rose in his eyes.

"If I ever make acquaintance with him, Walter," he returned, "it will be that I may hear tidings of you. Rely on my not wronging your forbearance and consideration. It would be to wrong it, not to tell him all the truth, before I sought a word of confidence from him. But I have no friend or acquaintance except you: and even for your sake, am little likely to make any."

"I wish," said Walter, "you had suffered me to be your friend indeed. I always wished it, Mr. Carker, as you know; but never half so much as now, when we are going to part."

"It is enough," replied the other, "that you have been the friend of my own breast, and that when I have avoided you most, my heart inclined the most towards you, and was fullest of you. Walter, good-by!"

"Good-by, Mr. Carker. Heaven be with you, sir!" cried Walter, with emotion.

"If," said the other, retaining his hand while he spoke; "if when you come back, you miss me from my old corner, and should hear from any one where I am lying, come and look upon my grave. Think that I might have been as honest and as happy as you! And let *me* think, when I know my time is coming on, that some one like my former self may stand there, for a

moment, and remember me with pity and forgiveness! Walter, good-by!"

His figure crept like a shadow down the bright, sunlighted street, so cheerful yet so solemn in the early summer morning; and slowly passed away.

The relentless chronometer at last announced that Walter must turn his back upon the Wooden Midshipman: and away they went, himself, his uncle, and the captain, in a hackney-coach to a wharf, where they were to take steamboat for some Reach down the river, the name of which, as the captain gave it out, was a hopeless mystery to the ears of landsmen. Arrived at this Reach (whither the ship had repaired by last night's tide), they were boarded by various excited watermen, and among others by a dirty Cyclops of the captain's acquaintance, who, with his one eye, had made the captain out some mile and a half off, and had been exchanging unintelligible roars with him ever since. Becoming the lawful prize of this personage, who was frightfully hoarse and constitutionally in want of shaving, they were all three put aboard the Son and Heir. And the Son and Heir was in a pretty state of confusion, with sails lying all bedraggled on the wet decks, loose ropes tripping people up, men in red shirts running barefoot to and fro, casks blockading every foot of space, and, in the thickest of the fray, a black cook in a black caboose up to his eyes in vegetables and blinded with smoke.

The captain immediately drew Walter into a corner, and with a great effort, that made his face very red, pulled up the silver watch which was so big, and so tight in his pocket, that it came out like a bung.

"Wal'r," said the captain, handing it over, and shak-

ing him heartily by the hand, "a parting gift, my lad. Put it back half an hour every morning, and about another quarter towards the arternoon, and it's a watch that'll do you credit."

"Captain Cuttle! I couldn't think of it!" cried Walter, detaining him, for he was running away. "Pray take it back. I have one already."

"Then Wal'r," said the captain, suddenly diving into one of his pockets and bringing up the two teaspoons and the sugar-tongs, with which he had armed himself to meet such an objection, "Take this here trifle of plate, instead."

"No, no, I couldn't indeed!" cried Walter, "a thousand thanks! Don't throw them away, Captain Cuttle!" for the captain was about to jerk them overboard. "They'll be of much more use to you than me. Give me your stick. I have often thought that I should like to have it. There! Good-by, Captain Cuttle! Take care of my uncle! Uncle Sol, God bless you!"

They were over the side in the confusion, before Walter caught another glimpse of either; and when he ran up to the stern, and looked after them, he saw his uncle hanging down his head in the boat, and Captain Cuttle rapping him on the back with the great silver watch (it must have been very painful), and gesticulating hopefully with the teaspoons and sugar-tongs. Catching sight of Walter, Captain Cuttle dropped the property into the bottom of the boat with perfect unconcern, being evidently oblivious of its existence, and pulling off the glazed hat hailed him lustily. The glazed hat made quite a show in the sun with its glistening, and the captain continued to wave it until he could be seen no longer. Then the confusion on board, which had

been rapidly increasing, reached its height; two or three other boats went away with a cheer; the sails shone bright and full above, as Walter watched them spread their surface to the favorable breeze; the water flew in sparkles from the prow; and off upon her voyage went the Son and Heir, as hopefully and trippingly as many another son and heir, gone down, had started on his way before her.

Day after day, Old Sol and Captain Cuttle kept her reckoning in the little back parlor and worked out her course with the chart spread before them on the round table. At night, when old Sol climbed up-stairs, so lonely, to the attic where it sometimes blew great guns, he looked up at the stars and listened to the wind, and kept a longer watch than would have fallen to his lot on board the ship. The last bottle of the old Madeira, which had had its cruising days, and known its dangers of the deep, lay silently beneath its dust and cobwebs, in the mean while, undisturbed.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. DOMBEY GOES UPON A JOURNEY.

"Mr. Dombey, sir," said Major Bagstock, "Joey B. is not in general a man of sentiment, for Joseph is tough. But Joe has his feelings, sir, and when they *are* awakened — Damme, Mr. Dombey," cried the major with sudden ferocity, "this is weakness, and I won't submit to it!"

Major Bagstock delivered himself of these expressions on receiving Mr. Dombey as his guest at the head of his own staircase in Princess's-place. Mr. Dombey had come to breakfast with the major, previous to their setting forth on their trip; and the ill-starred native had already undergone a world of misery arising out of the muffins, while, in connection with the general question of boiled eggs, life was a burden to him.

"It is not for an old soldier of the Bagstock breed," observed the major, relapsing into a mild state, "to deliver himself up, a prey to his own emotions; but — damme, sir," cried the major, in another spasm of ferocity, "I condole with you!"

The major's purple visage deepened in its hue, and the major's lobster eyes stood out in bolder relief, as he shook Mr. Dombey by the hand, imparting to that peaceful action as defiant a character as if it had been the prelude to his immediately boxing Mr. Dombey for

a thousand pounds a side and the championship of England. With a rotatory motion of his head, and a wheeze very like the cough of a horse, the major then conducted his visitor to the sitting-room, and there welcomed him (having now composed his feelings) with the freedom and frankness of a travelling companion.

"Dombey," said the major, "I'm glad to see you. I'm proud to see you. There are not many men in Europe to whom J. Bagstock would say that — for Josh is blunt, sir: it's his nature — but Joey B. is proud to see you, Dombey."

"Major," returned Mr. Dombey, "you are very obliging."

"No, sir," said the major, "Devil a bit! That's not my character. If that had been Joe's character, Joe might have been, by this time, Lieutenant-General Sir Joseph Bagstock, K. C. B., and might have received you in very different quarters. You don't know old Joe yet, I find. But this occasion, being special, is a source of pride to me. By the Lord, sir," said the major, resolutely, "it's an honor to me!"

Mr. Dombey, in his estimation of himself and his money, felt that this was very true, and therefore did not dispute the point. But the instinctive recognition of such a truth by the major, and his plain avowal of it, were very agreeable. It was a confirmation to Mr. Dombey, if he had required any, of his not being mistaken in the major. It was an assurance to him that his power extended beyond his own immediate sphere; and that the major, as an officer and a gentleman, had a no less becoming sense of it, than the beadle of the Royal Exchange.

And if it were ever consolatory to know this, or the

like of this, it was consolatory then, when the impotence of his will, the instability of his hopes, the feebleness of wealth, had been so direfully impressed upon him. What could it do, his boy had asked him. Sometimes, thinking of the baby question, he could hardly forbear inquiring, himself, what *could* it do indeed: what had it done?

But these were lonely thoughts, bred late at night in the sullen despondency and gloom of his retirement, and pride easily found its reassurance in many testimonies to the truth, as unimpeachable and precious as the major's. Mr. Dombey, in his friendlessness, inclined to the major. It cannot be said that he warmed towards him, but he thawed a little. The major had had some part — and not too much — in the days by the seaside. He was a man of the world, and knew some great people. He talked much, and told stories; and Mr. Dombey was disposed to regard him as a choice spirit who shone in society, and who had not that poisonous ingredient of poverty with which choice spirits in general are too much adulterated. His station was undeniable. Altogether the major was a creditable companion, well accustomed to a life of leisure, and to such places as that they were about to visit, and having an air of gentlemanly ease about him that mixed well enough with his own city character, and did not compete with it at all. If Mr. Dombey had any lingering idea that the major, as a man accustomed, in the way of his calling, to make light of the ruthless hand that had lately crushed his hopes, might unconsciously impart some useful philosophy to him, and scare away his weak regrets, he hid it from himself, and left it lying at the bottom of his pride, unexamined.

"Where is my scoundrel!" said the major, looking wrathfully round the room.

The native, who had no particular name, but answered to any vituperative epithet, presented himself instantly at the door, and ventured to come no nearer.

"You villain!" said the choleric major, "where's the breakfast?"

The dark servant disappeared in search of it, and was quickly heard reascending the stairs in such a tremulous state, that the plates and dishes on the tray he carried, trembling sympathetically as he came, rattled again all the way up.

"Dombey," said the major, glancing at the native as he arranged the table, and encouraging him with an awful shake of his fist when he upset a spoon, "here is a devilled grill, a savory pie, a dish of kidneys, and so forth. Pray sit down. Old Joe can give you nothing but camp fare, you see."

"Very excellent fare, major," replied his guest; and not in mere politeness either; for the major always took the best possible care of himself, and indeed ate rather more of rich meats than was good for him, insomuch that his Imperial complexion was mainly referred by the faculty to that circumstance.

"You have been looking over the way, sir," observed the major. "Have you seen our friend?"

"You mean Miss Tox," retorted Mr. Dombey. "No."

"Charming woman, sir," said the major, with a fat laugh rising in his short throat, and nearly suffocating him.

"Miss Tox is a very good sort of person, I believe," replied Mr. Dombey.

The haughty coldness of the reply seemed to afford

Major Bagstock infinite delight. He swelled and swelled, exceedingly; and even laid down his knife and fork for a moment, to rub his hands.

"Old Joe, sir," said the major, "was a bit of a favorite in that quarter once. But Joe has had his day. J. Bagstock is extinguished — outrivalled — floored, sir. I tell you what, Dombey." The major paused in his eating, and looked mysteriously indignant. "That's a de-vilish ambitious woman, sir."

Mr. Dombey said "Indeed!" with frigid indifference: mingled perhaps with some contemptuous incredulity as to Miss Tox having the presumption to harbor such a superior quality.

"That woman, sir," said the major, "is, in her way, a Lucifer. Joey B. has had his day, sir, but he keeps his eyes. He sees, does Joe. His Royal Highness the late Duke of York observed of Joey, at a levee, that he saw."

The major accompanied this with such a look, and, between eating, drinking, hot tea, devilled grill, muffins, and meaning, was altogether so swollen and inflamed about the head, that even Mr. Dombey showed some anxiety for him.

"That ridiculous old spectacle, sir," pursued the major, "aspires. She aspires sky-high, sir. Matrimonially, Dombey."

"I am sorry for her," said Mr. Dombey.

"Don't say that, Dombey," returned the major, in a warning voice.

"Why should I not, major?" said Mr. Dombey.

The major gave no answer but the horse's cough, and went on eating vigorously.

"She has taken an interest in your household," said

the major, stopping short again, "and been a frequent visitor at your house for some time now."

"Yes," replied Mr. Dombey with great stateliness, "Miss Tox was originally received there, at the time of Mrs. Dombey's death, as a friend of my sister's; and being a well-behaved person, and showing a liking for the poor infant, she was permitted — I may say encouraged — to repeat her visits, with my sister, and gradually to occupy a kind of footing of familiarity in the family. I have," said Mr. Dombey, in the tone of a man who was making a great and valuable concession, "I have a respect for Miss Tox. She has been so obliging as to render many little services in my house: trifling and insignificant services perhaps, major, but not to be disparaged on that account: and I hope I have had the good fortune to be enabled to acknowledge them by such attention and notice as it has been in my power to bestow. I hold myself indebted to Miss Tox, major," added Mr. Dombey, with a slight wave of his hand, "for the pleasure of your acquaintance."

"Dombey," said the major warmly; "no! No, sir! Joseph Bagstock can never permit that assertion to pass uncontradicted. Your knowledge of old Joe, sir, such as he is, and old Joe's knowledge of you, sir, had its origin in a noble fellow, sir — in a great creature, sir. Dombey!" said the major, with a struggle which it was not very difficult to parade, his whole life being a struggle against all kinds of apoplectic symptoms, "we knew each other through your boy."

Mr. Dombey seemed touched, as it is not improbable the major designed he should be, by this allusion. He looked down and sighed: and the major, rousing himself fiercely, again said, in reference to the state of mind into

which he felt himself in danger of falling, that this was weakness, and nothing should induce him to submit to it.

"Our friend had a remote connection with that event," said the major, "and all the credit that belongs to her, J. B. is willing to give her, sir. Notwithstanding which, ma'am," he added, raising his eyes from his plate, and casting them across Princess's-place, to where Miss Tox was at that moment visible at her window watering her flowers, "you're a scheming jade, ma'am, and your ambition is a piece of monstrous impudence. If it only made yourself ridiculous, ma'am," said the major, rolling his head at the unconscious Miss Tox, while his starting eyes appeared to make a leap towards her, "you might do that to your heart's content, ma'am, without any objection, I assure you, on the part of Bagstock." Here the major laughed frightfully up in the tips of his ears and in the veins of his head. "But when, ma'am," said the major, "you compromise other people, and generous, unsuspicious people too, as a repayment for their condescension, you stir the blood of old Joe in his body."

"Major," said Mr. Dombey, reddening, "I hope you do not hint at anything so absurd on the part of Miss Tox as"—

"Dombey," returned the major, "I hint at nothing. But Joey B. has lived in the world, sir: lived in the world with his eyes open, sir, and his ears cocked: and Joe tells you, Dombey, that there's a de-vilish artful and ambitious woman over the way."

Mr. Dombey involuntarily glanced over the way; and an angry glance he sent in that direction, too.

"That's all on such a subject that shall pass the lips of Joseph Bagstock," said the major firmly. "Joe is not a tale-bearer, but there are times when he must speak,

when he *will* speak! — confound your arts, ma'am," cried the major, again apostrophizing his fair neighbor, with great ire — "when the provocation is too strong to admit of his remaining silent."

The emotion of this outbreak threw the major into a paroxysm of horse's coughs, which held him for a long time. On recovering he added:

"And now, Dombey, as you have invited Joe — old Joe, who has no other merit, sir, but that he is tough and hearty — to be your guest and guide at Leamington, command him in any way you please, and he is wholly yours. I don't know, sir," said the major, wagging his double chin with a jocose air, "what it is you people see in Joe to make you hold him in such great request, all of you; but this I know, sir, that if he wasn't pretty tough, and obstinate in his refusals, you'd kill him among you with your invitations and so forth, in double quick time."

Mr. Dombey, in a few words, expressed his sense of the preference he received over those other distinguished members of society who were clamoring for the possession of Major Bagstock. But the major cut him short by giving him to understand that he followed his own inclinations, and that they had risen up in a body and said with one accord, "J. B., Dombey is the man for you to choose as a friend."

The major being by this time in a state of repletion, with essence of savory pie oozing out at the corners of his eyes, and devilled grill and kidneys tightening his cravat: and the time moreover approaching for the departure of the railway train to Birmingham, by which they were to leave town: the native got him into his great-coat with immense difficulty, and buttoned him up

until his face looked staring and gasping, over the top of that garment, as if he were in a barrel. The native then handed him separately, and with a decent interval between each supply, his wash-leather gloves, his thick stick, and his hat; which latter article the major wore with a rakish air, on one side of his head, by way of toning down his remarkable visage. The native had previously packed, in all possible and impossible parts of Mr. Dombey's chariot, which was in waiting, an unusual quantity of carpet-bags and small portmanteaus, no less apoplectic in appearance than the major himself: and having filled his own pockets with Seltzer water, East India sherry, sandwiches, shawls, telescopes, maps, and newspapers, any or all of which light baggage the major might require at any instant of the journey, he announced that everything was ready. To complete the equipment of this unfortunate foreigner (currently believed to be a prince in his own country), when he took his seat in the rumble by the side of Mr. Towlinson, a pile of the major's cloaks and great-coats was hurled upon him by the landlord, who aimed at him from the pavement with those great missiles like a Titan, and so covered him up, that he proceeded in a living tomb to the railroad station.

But before the carriage moved away, and while the native was in the act of sepulture, Miss Tox appearing at her window, waved a lily-white handkerchief. Mr. Dombey received this parting salutation very coldly — very coldly even for him — and honoring her with the slightest possible inclination of his head, leaned back in the carriage with a very discontented look. His marked behavior seemed to afford the major (who was all politeness in his recognition of Miss Tox) unbounded satis-

faction; and he sat for a long time afterwards, leering, and choking, like an over-fed Mephistopheles.

During the bustle of preparation at the railway, Mr. Dombey and the major walked up and down the platform side by side; the former taciturn and gloomy, and the latter entertaining him, or entertaining himself, with a variety of anecdotes and reminiscences, in most of which Joe Bagstock was the principal performer. Neither of the two observed that in the course of these walks, they attracted the attention of a workingman who was standing near the engine, and who touched his hat every time they passed; for Mr. Dombey habitually looked over the vulgar herd, not at them; and the major was looking, at the time, into the core of one of his stories. At length, however, this man stepped before them as they turned round, and pulling his hat off, and keeping it off, ducked his head to Mr. Dombey.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said the man, "but I hope you're a-doin' pretty well, sir."

He was dressed in a canvas suit abundantly besmeared with coal-dust and oil, and had cinders in his whiskers, and a smell of half-slaked ashes all over him. He was not a bad-looking fellow, nor even what could be fairly called a dirty-looking fellow, in spite of this; and, in short, he was Mr. Toodle, professionally clothed.

"I shall have the honor of stokin' of you down, sir," said Mr. Toodle. "Beg your pardon, sir. I hope you find yourself a-coming round!"

Mr. Dombey looked at him, in return for his tone of interest, as if a man like that would make his very eyesight dirty.

"'Scuse the liberty, sir," said Toodle, seeing he was

not clearly remembered, "but my wife Polly, as was called Richards in your family" —

A change in Mr. Dombey's face, which seemed to express recollection of him, and so it did, but it expressed in a much stronger degree an angry sense of humiliation, stopped Mr. Toodle short.

"Your wife wants money, I suppose," said Mr. Dombey, putting his hand in his pocket, and speaking (but that he always did) haughtily.

"No thank'ee, sir," returned Toodle, "I can't say she does. *I* don't."

Mr. Dombey was stopped short now in his turn: and awkwardly: with his hand in his pocket.

"No sir," said Toodle, turning his oilskin cap round and round; "we're a-doin' pretty well sir; we haven't no cause to complain in the worldly way, sir. We've had four more since then, sir, but we rubs on."

Mr. Dombey would have rubbed on to his own carriage, though in so doing he had rubbed the stoker underneath the wheels; but his attention was arrested by something in connection with the cap still going slowly round and round in the man's hand.

"We lost one babby," observed Toodle, "there's no denyin'."

"Lately," added Mr. Dombey, looking at the cap.

"No, sir, up'ard of three years ago, but all the rest is hearty. And in the matter o' readin' sir," said Toodle, ducking again, as if to remind Mr. Dombey of what had passed between them on that subject long ago, "them boys o' mine, they learned me, among 'em, arter all. They've made a wery tolerable scholar of me, sir, them boys."

"Come, major!" said Mr. Dombey.

"Beg your pardon, sir," resumed Toodle, taking a step before them, and deferentially stopping them again, still cap in hand: "I wouldn't have troubled you with such a pint except as a way of gettin' in the name of my son Biler — christened Robin — him as you was so good as to make a Charitable Grinder on."

"Well, man," said Mr. Dombey, in his severest manner. "What about him?"

"Why, sir," returned Toodle, shaking his head with a face of great anxiety and distress. "I'm forced to say, sir, that he's gone wrong."

"He has gone wrong, has he?" said Mr. Dombey, with a hard kind of satisfaction.

"He has fell into bad company, you see, gentlemen," pursued the father, looking wistfully at both, and evidently taking the major into the conversation with the hope of having his sympathy. "He has got into bad ways. God send he may come to again, genelmen, but he's on the wrong track now! You could hardly be off hearing of it somehow, sir," said Toodle, again addressing Mr. Dombey individually; "and it's better I should out and say my boy's gone rather wrong. Polly's dreadful down about it, gentelmen," said Toodle with the same dejected look, and another appeal to the major.

"A son of this man's whom I caused to be educated, major," said Mr. Dombey, giving him his arm. "The usual return!"

"Take advice from plain old Joe, and never educate that sort of people, sir," returned the major. "Damme, sir, it never does! It always fails!"

The simple father was beginning to submit that he hoped his son, the quondam Grinder, huffed and cuffed, and flogged and badged, and taught, as parrots are, by a

brute jobbed into his place of schoolmaster with as much fitness for it as a hound, might not have been educated on quite a right plan in some undiscovered respect, when Mr. Dombey angrily repeating "The usual return!" led the major away. And the major being heavy to hoist in to Mr. Dombey's carriage, elevated in mid-air, and having to stop and swear that he would flay the native alive, and break every bone in his skin, and visit other physical torments upon him, every time he couldn't get his foot on the step, and fell back on that dark exile, had barely time before they started to repeat hoarsely that it would never do: that it always failed: and that if he were to educate "his own vagabond," he would certainly be hanged.

Mr. Dombey assented bitterly; but there was something more in his bitterness, and in his moody way of falling back in the carriage, and looking with knitted brows at the changing objects without, than the failure of that noble educational system administered by the Grinders' Company. He had seen upon the man's rough cap a piece of new crape, and he had assured himself, from his manner and his answers, that he wore it for his son.

So! from high to low, at home or abroad, from Florence in his great house to the coarse churl who was feeding the fire then smoking before them, every one set up some claim or other to a share in his dead boy, and was a bidder against him! Could he ever forget how that woman had wept over his pillow, and called him her own child! or how he, waking from his sleep, had asked for her, and had raised himself in his bed and brightened when she came in!

To think of this presumptuous raker among coals and

ashes going on before there, with his sign of mourning! To think that he dared to enter, even by a common show like that, into the trial and disappointment of a proud gentleman's secret heart! To think that this lost child, who was to have divided with him his riches, and his projects, and his power, and allied with whom he was to have shut out all the world as with a double door of gold, should have let in such a herd to insult him with their knowledge of his defeated hopes, and their boasts of claiming community of feeling with himself, so far removed: if not of having crept into the place wherein he would have lorded it alone!

He found no pleasure or relief in the journey. Tortured by these thoughts, he carried monotony with him, through the rushing landscape, and hurried headlong, not through a rich and varied country, but a wilderness of blighted plans and gnawing jealousies. The very speed at which the train was whirled along mocked the swift course of the young life that had been borne away so steadily and so inexorably to its fore-doomed end. The power that forced itself upon its iron way — its own — defiant of all paths and roads, piercing through the heart of every obstacle, and dragging living creatures of all classes, ages, and degrees behind it, was a type of the triumphant monster Death!

Away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, from the town, burrowing among the dwellings of men and making the streets hum, flashing out into the meadows for a moment, mining in through the damp earth, booming on in darkness and heavy air, bursting out again into the sunny day so bright and wide; away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, through the fields, through the woods, through the corn, through the hay, through the

chalk, through the mould, through the clay, through the rock, among objects close at hand and almost in the grasp, ever flying from the traveller, and a deceitful distance ever moving slowly within him: like as in the track of the remorseless monster, Death!

Through the hollow, on the height, by the heath, by the orchard, by the park, by the garden, over the canal, across the river, where the sheep are feeding, where the mill is going, where the barge is floating, where the dead are lying, where the factory is smoking, where the stream is running, where the village clusters, where the great cathedral rises, where the bleak moor lies, and the wild breeze smooths or ruffles it at its inconstant will; away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, and no trace to leave behind but dust and vapor: like as in the track of the remorseless monster, Death!

Breasting the wind and light, the shower and sunshine, away, and still away, it rolls and roars, fierce and rapid, smooth and certain, and great works and massive bridges crossing up above, fall like a beam of shadow an inch broad, upon the eye, and then are lost. Away, and still away, onward and onward ever: glimpses of cottage-homes, of houses, mansions, rich estates, of husbandry and handicraft, of people, of old roads and paths that look deserted, small, and insignificant as they are left behind; and so they do, and what else is there but such glimpses, in the track of the indomitable monster, Death!

Away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, plunging down into the earth again, and working on in such a storm of energy and perseverance, that amidst the darkness and whirlwind the motion seems reversed, and to tend furiously backward, until a ray of light upon the

wet wall shows its surface flying past like a fierce stream. Away once more into the day, and through the day, with a shrill yell of exultation, roaring, rattling, tearing on, spurning everything with its dark breath, sometimes pausing for a minute where a crowd of faces are, that in a minute more are not: sometimes lapping water greedily, and before the spout at which it drinks has ceased to drip upon the ground, shrieking, roaring, rattling through the purple distance!

Louder and louder yet, it shrieks and cries as it comes tearing on resistless to the goal; and now its way, still like the way of Death, is strewn with ashes thickly. Everything around is blackened. There are dark pools of water, muddy lanes, and miserable habitations far below. There are jagged walls and falling houses close at hand, and through the battered roofs and broken windows, wretched rooms are seen, where want and fever hide themselves in many wretched shapes, while smoke and crowded gables, and distorted chimneys, and deformity of brick and mortar penning up deformity of mind and body, choke the murky distance. As Mr. Dombey looks out of his carriage-window, it is never in his thoughts that the monster who has brought him there has let the light of day in on these things: not made or caused them. It was the journey's fitting end, and might have been the end of everything; it was so ruinous and dreary.

So, pursuing the one course of thought, he had the one relentless monster still before him. All things looked black, and cold, and deadly upon him, and he on them. He found a likeness to his misfortune everywhere. There was a remorseless triumph going on about him, and it galled and stung him in his pride and

jealousy, whatever form it took: though most of all when it divided with him the love and memory of his lost boy.

There was a face — he had looked upon it, on the previous night, and it on him with eyes that read his soul, though they were dim with tears, and hidden soon behind two quivering hands — that often had attended him in fancy — on this ride. He had seen it, with the expression of last night, timidly pleading to him. It was not reproachful, but there was something of doubt, almost of hopeful incredulity in it, which, as he once more saw that fade away into a desolate certainty of his dislike, was like reproach. It was a trouble to him to think of this face of Florence.

Because he felt any new compunction towards it? No. Because the feeling it awakened in him — of which he had had some old foreshadowing in older times — was full-formed now, and spoke out plainly, moving him too much, and threatening to grow too strong for his composure. Because the face was abroad, in the expression of defeat and persecution that seemed to encircle him like the air. Because it barbed the arrow of that cruel and remorseless enemy on which his thoughts so ran, and put into its grasp a double-handed sword. Because he knew full well, in his own breast, as he stood there, tinging the scene of transition before him with the morbid colors of his own mind, and making it a ruin and a picture of decay, instead of hopeful change, and promise of better things, that life had quite as much to do with his complainings as death. One child was gone, and one child left. Why was the object of his hope removed instead of her?

The sweet, calm, gentle presence in his fancy, moved

him to no reflection but that. She had been unwelcome to him from the first; she was an aggravation of his bitterness now. If his son had been his only child, and the same blow had fallen on him, it would have been heavy to bear; but infinitely lighter than now, when it might have fallen on her (whom he could have lost, or he believed it, without a pang), and had not. Her loving and innocent face rising before him, had no softening or winning influence. He rejected the angel, and took up with the tormenting spirit crouching in his bosom. Her patience, goodness, youth, devotion, love, were as so many atoms in the ashes upon which he set his heel. He saw her image in the blight and blackness all around him, not irradiating but deepening the gloom. More than once upon this journey, and now again as he stood pondering at this journey's end, tracing figures in the dust with his stick, the thought came into his mind, what was there he could interpose between himself and it?

The major, who had been blowing and panting all the way down, like another engine, and whose eye had often wandered from his newspaper to leer at the prospect, as if there were a great procession of discomfited Miss Toxes pouring out in the smoke of the train, and flying away over the fields to hide themselves in any place of refuge, aroused his friend by informing him that the post-horses were harnessed and the carriage ready.

"Dombey," said the major, rapping him on the arm with his cane, "don't be thoughtful. It's a bad habit. Old Joe, sir, wouldn't be as tough as you see him, if he had ever encouraged it. You are too great a man, Dombey, to be thoughtful. In your position, sir, you're far above that kind of thing."

The major, even in his friendly remonstrances, thus

consulting the dignity and honor of Mr. Dombey, and showing a lively sense of their importance, Mr. Dombey felt more than ever disposed to defer to a gentleman possessing so much good sense and such a well-regulated mind; accordingly he made an effort to listen to the major's stories, as they trotted along the turnpike-road; and the major, finding both the pace and the road a great deal better adapted to his conversational powers than the mode of travelling they had just relinquished, came out for his entertainment.

In this flow of spirits and conversation, only interrupted by his usual plethoric symptoms, and by intervals of lunch, and from time to time by some violent assault upon the native, who wore a pair of ear-rings in his dark-brown ears, and on whom his European clothes sat with an outlandish impossibility of adjustment — being, of their own accord, and without any reference to the tailor's art, long where they ought to be short, short where they ought to be long, tight where they ought to be loose, and loose where they ought to be tight — and to which he imparted a new grace, whenever the major attacked him, by shrinking into them like a shrivelled nut, or a cold monkey — in this flow of spirits and conversation, the major continued all day: so that when evening came on, and found them trotting through the green and leafy road near Leamington, the major's voice, what with talking and eating and chuckling and choking, appeared to be in the box under the rumble, or in some neighboring haystack. Nor did the major improve it at the Royal Hotel, where rooms and dinner had been ordered, and where he so oppressed his organs of speech by eating and drinking, that when he retired to bed he had no voice at all, except to cough with, and could only

make himself intelligible to the dark servant by gasping at him.

He not only rose next morning, however, like a giant refreshed, but conducted himself, at breakfast, like a giant refreshing. At this meal they arranged their daily habits. The major was to take the responsibility of ordering everything to eat and drink; and they were to have a late breakfast together every morning, and a late dinner together every day. Mr. Dombey would prefer remaining in his own room, or walking in the country by himself, on that first day of their sojourn at Leamington; but next morning he would be happy to accompany the major to the Pump-room, and about the town. So they parted until dinner-time. Mr. Dombey retired to nurse his wholesome thoughts in his own way. The major, attended by the native carrying a camp-stool, a great-coat, and an umbrella, swaggered up and down through all the public places; looking into subscription books to find out who was there, looking up old ladies by whom he was much admired, reporting J. B. tougher than ever, and puffing his rich friend Dombey wherever he went. There never was a man who stood by a friend more stanchly than the major, when in puffing him, he puffed himself.

It was surprising how much new conversation the major had to let off at dinner-time, and what occasion he gave Mr. Dombey to admire his social qualities. At breakfast next morning, he knew the contents of the latest newspapers received; and mentioned several subjects in connection with them, on which his opinion had recently been sought by persons of such power and might, that they were only to be obscurely hinted at. Mr. Dombey, who had been so long shut up within him-

self, and who had rarely, at any time, overstepped the enchanted circle within which the operations of Dombey and Son were conducted, began to think this an improvement on his solitary life; and in place of excusing himself for another day, as he had thought of doing when alone, walked out with the major arm-in-arm.

CHAPTER XXI.

NEW FACES.

The major, more blue-faced and staring — more overripe, as it were, than ever — and giving vent, every now and then, to one of the horse's coughs, not so much of necessity as in a spontaneous explosion of importance, walked arm-in-arm with Mr. Dombey up the sunny side of the way, with his cheeks swelling over his tight stock, his legs majestically wide apart, and his great head wagging from side to side, as if he were remonstrating within himself for being such a captivating object. They had not walked many yards before the major encountered somebody he knew, nor many yards farther before the major encountered somebody else he knew, but he merely shook his fingers at them as he passed, and led Mr. Dombey on: pointing out the localities as they went, and enlivening the walk with any current scandal suggested by them.

In this manner the major and Mr. Dombey were walking arm-in-arm, much to their own satisfaction, when they beheld advancing towards them a wheeled chair, in which a lady was seated, indolently steering her carriage by a kind of rudder in front, while it was propelled by some unseen power in the rear. Although the lady was not young, she was very blooming in the face — quite rosy — and her dress and attitude were per-

fectly juvenile. Walking by the side of the chair, and carrying her gossamer parasol with a proud and weary air, as if so great an effort must be soon abandoned, and the parasol dropped, sauntered a much younger lady, very handsome, very haughty, very wilful, who tossed her head and drooped her eyelids, as though, if there were anything in all the world worth looking into, save a mirror, it certainly was not the earth or sky.

"Why, what the devil have we here, sir!" cried the major, stopping as this little cavalcade drew near.

"My dearest Edith!" drawled the lady in the chair, "Major Bagstock!"

The major no sooner heard the voice, than he relinquished Mr. Dombey's arm, darted forward, took the hand of the lady in the chair and pressed it to his lips. With no less gallantry the major folded both his gloves upon his heart and bowed low to the other lady. And now, the chair having stopped, the motive power became visible in the shape of a flushed page pushing behind, who seemed to have in part outgrown and in part outpushed his strength, for when he stood upright he was tall, and wan, and thin, and his plight appeared the more forlorn from his having injured the shape of his hat, by butting at the carriage with his head to urge it forward, as is sometimes done by elephants in Oriental countries.

"Joe Bagstock," said the major to both ladies, "is a proud and happy man for the rest of his life."

"You false creature," said the old lady in the chair, insipidly. "Where do you come from? I can't bear you."

"Then suffer old Joe to present a friend, ma'am," said the major, promptly, "as a reason for being tolerated.

Mr. Dombey, Mrs. Skewton." The lady in the chair was gracious. "Mr. Dombey, Mrs. Granger." The lady with the parasol was faintly conscious of Mr. Dombey's taking off his hat, and bowing low. "I am delighted, sir," said the major, "to have this opportunity."

The major seemed in earnest, for he looked at all the three and leered in his ugliest manner.

"Mrs. Skewton, Dombey," said the major, "makes havoc in the heart of old Josh."

Mr. Dombey signified that he didn't wonder at it.

"You perfidious goblin," said the lady in the chair, "have done! How long have you been here, bad man?"

"One day," replied the major.

"And can you be a day, or even a minute," returned the lady, slightly settling her false curls and false eyebrows with her fan, and showing her false teeth, set off by her false complexion, "in the garden of what's-its-name" —

"Eden, I suppose, mama," interrupted the younger lady, scornfully.

"My dear Edith," said the other, "I cannot help it. I never can remember those frightful names — without having your whole soul and being inspired by the sight of nature; by the perfume," said Mrs. Skewton, rustling a handkerchief that was faint and sickly with essences, "of her artless breath, you creature!"

The discrepancy between Mrs. Skewton's fresh enthusiasm of words, and forlornly faded manner, was hardly less observable than that between her age, which was about seventy, and her dress, which would have been youthful for twenty-seven. Her attitude in the wheeled chair (which she never varied) was one in which she

had been taken in a barouche, some fifty years before, by a then fashionable artist, who had appended to his published sketch the name of Cleopatra: in consequence of a discovery made by the critics of the time, that it bore an exact resemblance to that princess as she reclined on board her galley. Mrs. Skewton was a beauty then, and bucks threw wine-glasses over their heads by dozens in her honor. The beauty and the barouche had both passed away, but she still preserved the attitude, and for this reason expressly, maintained the wheeled chair and the butting page: there being nothing whatever, except the attitude, to prevent her from walking.

"Mr. Dombey is devoted to nature, I trust?" said Mrs. Skewton, settling her diamond brooch. And by the way, she chiefly lived upon the reputation of some diamonds, and her family connections.

"My friend Dombey, ma'am," returned the major, "may be devoted to her in secret, but a man who is paramount in the greatest city in the universe"—

"No one can be a stranger," said Mrs. Skewton, "to Mr. Dombey's immense influence."

As Mr. Dombey acknowledged the compliment with a bend of his head, the younger lady glancing at him, met his eyes.

"You reside here, madam?" said Mr. Dombey, addressing her.

"No, we have been to a great many places. To Harrogate, and Scarborough, and into Devonshire. We have been visiting, and resting here and there. Mama likes change."

"Edith of course does not," said Mrs. Skewton, with a ghastly archness.

"I have not found that there is any change in such

places," was the answer, delivered with supreme indifference.

"They libel me. There is only one change, Mr. Dombey," observed Mrs. Skewton, with a mincing sigh, "for which I really care, and that I fear I shall never be permitted to enjoy. People cannot spare one. But seclusion and contemplation are my what's-his-name" —

"If you mean Paradise, mama, you had better say so, to render yourself intelligible," said the younger lady.

"My dearest Edith," returned Mrs. Skewton, "you know that I am wholly dependent upon you for those odious names. I assure you, Mr. Dombey, Nature intended me for an Arcadian. I am thrown away in society. Cows are my passion. What I have ever sighed for, has been to retreat to a Swiss farm, and live entirely surrounded by cows — and china."

This curious association of objects, suggesting a remembrance of the celebrated bull who got by mistake into a crockery shop, was received with perfect gravity by Mr. Dombey, who intimated his opinion that Nature was, no doubt, a very respectable institution.

"What I want," drawled Mrs. Skewton, pinching her shrivelled throat, "is heart." It was frightfully true in one sense, if not in that in which she used the phrase. "What I want is frankness, confidence, less conventionality, and freer play of soul. We are so dreadfully artificial."

We were, indeed.

"In short," said Mrs. Skewton, "I want nature everywhere. It would be so extremely charming."

"Nature is inviting us away now, mama, if you are ready," said the younger lady, curling her handsome lip. At this hint, the wan page, who had been surveying the

party over the top of the chair, vanished behind it, as if the ground had swallowed him up.

"Stop a moment, Withers!" said Mrs. Skewton, as the chair began to move; calling to the page with all the languid dignity with which she had called in days of yore to a coachman with a wig, cauliflower nosegay, and silk stockings. "Where are you staying, abomination?"

The major was staying at the Royal Hotel, with his friend Dombey.

"You may come and see us any evening when you are good," lisped Mrs. Skewton. "If Mr. Dombey will honor us, we shall be happy. Withers, go on!"

The major again pressed to his blue lips the tips of the fingers that were disposed on the ledge of the wheeled chair with careful carelessness; after the Cleopatra model: and Mr. Dombey bowed. The elder lady honored them both with a very gracious smile and a girlish wave of her hand; the younger lady with the very slightest inclination of her head that common courtesy allowed.

The last glimpse of the wrinkled face of the mother, with that patched color on it which the sun made infinitely more haggard and dismal than any want of color could have been, and of the proud beauty of the daughter with her graceful figure and erect deportment, engendered such an involuntary disposition on the part of both the major and Mr. Dombey to look after them, that they both turned at the same moment. The page, nearly as much aslant as his own shadow, was toiling after the chair, up-hill, like a slow battering-ram: the top of Cleopatra's bonnet was fluttering in exactly the same corner to the inch as before; and the Beauty, loitering by herself a little in advance, expressed in all her ele-

gant form, from head to foot, the same supreme disregard of everything and everybody.

"I tell you what, sir," said the major, as they resumed their walk again. "If Joe Bagstock were a younger man, there's not a woman in the world whom he'd prefer for Mrs. Bagstock to that woman. By George, sir!" said the major, "she's superb!"

"Do you mean the daughter?" inquired Mr. Dombey.

"Is Joey B. a turnip, Dombey," said the major, "that he should mean the mother!"

"You were complimentary to the mother," returned Mr. Dombey.

"An ancient flame, sir," chuckled Major Bagstock. "De-vilish ancient. I humor her."

"She impresses me as being perfectly genteel," said Mr. Dombey.

"Genteel, sir," said the major, stopping short, and staring in his companion's face. "The Honorable Mrs. Skewton, sir, is sister to the late Lord Feenix, and aunt to the present lord. The family are not wealthy — they're poor, indeed — and she lives upon a small jointure; but if you come to blood, sir!" The major gave a flourish with his stick and walked on again, in despair of being able to say what you came to, if you came to that.

"You addressed the daughter, I observed," said Mr. Dombey, after a short pause, "as Mrs. Granger."

"Edith Skewton, sir," returned the major, stopping short again, and punching a mark in the ground with his cane, to represent her, "married (at eighteen) Granger of Ours;" whom the major indicated by another punch. "Granger, sir," said the major, tapping the last ideal portrait, and rolling his head emphatically, "was Colonel

of Ours; a de-vilish handsome fellow, sir, of forty-one. He died, sir, in the second year of his marriage." The major ran the representative of the deceased Granger through and through the body with his walking-stick, and went on again, carrying his stick over his shoulder.

"How long is this ago?" asked Mr. Dombey, making another halt.

"Edith Granger, sir," replied the major, shutting one eye, putting his head on one side, passing his cane into his left hand, and smoothing his shirt-frill with his right, "is, at this present time, not quite thirty. And, damme, sir," said the major, shouldering his stick once more, and walking on again, "she's a peerless woman!"

"Was there any family?" asked Mr. Dombey, presently.

"Yes, sir," said the major. "There was a boy."

Mr. Dombey's eyes sought the ground, and a shade came over his face.

"Who was drowned, sir," pursued the major, "when a child of four or five years old."

"Indeed?" said Mr. Dombey, raising his head.

"By the upsetting of a boat in which his nurse had no business to have put him," said the major. "That's *his* history. Edith Granger is Edith Granger still; but if tough old Joey B., sir, were a little younger and a little richer, the name of that immortal paragon should be Bagstock."

The major heaved his shoulders, and his cheeks, and laughed more like an overfed Mephistopheles than ever, as he said the words.

"Provided the lady made no objection, I suppose?" said Mr. Dombey coldly.

"By Gad, sir," said the major, "the Bagstock breed

are not accustomed to that sort of obstacle. Though it's true enough that Edith might have married twen-ty times, but for being proud, sir, proud."

Mr. Dombey seemed, by his face, to think no worse of her for that.

"It's a great quality after all," said the major. "By the Lord, it's a high quality! Dombey! You are proud yourself, and your friend, old Joe, respects you for it, sir."

With this tribute to the character of his ally, which seemed to be wrung from him by the force of circumstances and the irresistible tendency of their conversation, the major closed the subject, and glided into a general exposition of the extent to which he had been beloved and doted on by splendid women and brilliant creatures.

On the next day but one, Mr. Dombey and the major encountered the Honorable Mrs. Skewton and her daughter in the pump-room; on the day after, they met them again very near the place where they had met them first. After meeting them thus, three or four times in all, it became a point of mere civility to old acquaintances, that the major should go there one evening. Mr. Dombey had not originally intended to pay visits, but on the major announcing this intention, he said he would have the pleasure of accompanying him. So the major told the Native to go round before dinner, and say, with his and Mr. Dombey's compliments, that they would have the honor of visiting the ladies that same evening, if the ladies were alone. In answer to which message, the Native brought back a very small note with a very large quantity of scent about it, indited by the Honorable Mrs. Skewton to Major Bagstock, and briefly saying, "You

are a shocking bear and I have a great mind not to forgive you, but if you are very good indeed," which was underlined, "you may come. Compliments (in which Edith unites) to Mr. Dombey."

The Honorable Mrs. Skewton and her daughter, Mrs. Granger, resided while at Leamington, in lodgings that were fashionable enough and dear enough, but rather limited in point of space and conveniences; so that the Honorable Mrs. Skewton, being in bed, had her feet in the window and her head in the fire-place, while the Honorable Mrs. Skewton's maid was quartered in a closet within the drawing-room, so extremely small, that, to avoid developing the whole of its accommodations, she was obliged to writhe in and out of the door like a beautiful serpent. Withers, the wan page, slept out of the house immediately under the tiles at a neighboring milk-shop; and the wheeled chair, which was the stone of that young Sisyphus, passed the night in a shed belonging to the same dairy, where new-laid eggs were produced by the poultry connected with the establishment, who roosted on a broken donkey-cart, persuaded, to all appearance, that it grew there, and was a species of tree.

Mr. Dombey and the major found Mrs. Skewton arranged, as Cleopatra, among the cushions of a sofa; very airily dressed; and certainly not resembling Shakspeare's Cleopatra, whom age could not wither. On their way upstairs they had heard the sound of a harp, but it had ceased on their being announced, and Edith now stood beside it handsomer and haughtier than ever. It was a remarkable characteristic of this lady's beauty that it appeared to vaunt and assert itself without her aid, and against her will. She knew that she was beautiful: it

was impossible that it could be otherwise : but she seemed with her own pride to defy her very self.

Whether she held cheap, attractions that could only call forth admiration that was worthless to her, or whether she designed to render them more precious to admirers by this usage of them, those to whom they *were* precious seldom paused to consider.

"I hope, Mrs. Granger," said Mr. Dombey, advancing a step towards her, "we are not the cause of your ceasing to play?"

"*You?* oh no!"

"Why do you not go on, then, my dearest Edith?" said Cleopatra.

"I left off as I began — of my own fancy."

The exquisite indifference of her manner in saying this: an indifference quite removed from dulness or insensibility, for it was pointed with proud purpose: was well set off by the carelessness with which she drew her hand across the strings, and came from that part of the room.

"Do you know, Mr. Dombey," said her languishing mother, playing with a hand-screen, "that occasionally my dearest Edith and myself actually almost differ" —

"Not quite, sometimes, mama?" said Edith.

"Oh never quite, my darling! Fie, fie, it would break my heart," returned her mother, making a faint attempt to pat her with the screen, which Edith made no movement to meet, — "about these cold conventionalities of manner that are observed in little things? Why are we not more natural! Dear me! With all those yearnings, and gushings, and impulsive throbbings that we have implanted in our souls, and which are so very charming, why are we not more natural?"

Mr. Dombey said it was very true, very true.

"We could be more natural I suppose if we tried?" said Mrs. Skewton.

Mr. Dombey thought it possible.

"Devil a bit, ma'am," said the major. "We couldn't afford it. Unless the world was peopled with J. B.'s — tough and blunt old Joes, ma'am, plain red herrings with hard roes, sir — we couldn't afford it. It wouldn't do."

"You naughty infidel," said Mrs. Skewton, "be mute."

"Cleopatra commands," returned the major, kissing his hand, "and Antony Bagstock obeys."

"The man has no sensitiveness," said Mrs. Skewton, cruelly holding up the hand-screen so as to shut the major out. "No sympathy. And what do we live for *but* sympathy! What else is so extremely charming! Without that gleam of sunshine on our cold cold earth," said Mrs. Skewton, arranging her lace tucker, and complacently observing the effect of her bare lean arm, looking upward from the wrist, "how could we possibly bear it? In short, obdurate man!" glancing at the major, round the screen, "I would have my world all heart; and Faith is so excessively charming, that I won't allow you to disturb it, do you hear?"

The major replied that it was hard in Cleopatra to require the world to be all heart, and yet to appropriate to herself the hearts of all the world; which obliged Cleopatra to remind him that flattery was insupportable to her, and that if he had the boldness to address her in that strain any more, she would positively send him home.

Withers the Wan, at this period, handing round the tea, Mr. Dombey again addressed himself to Edith.

"There is not much company here, it would seem?"

said Mr. Dombey, in his own portentous gentlemanly way.

"I believe not. We see none."

"Why really," observed Mrs. Skewton from her couch, "there are no people here just now with whom we care to associate."

"They have not enough heart," said Edith, with a smile. The very twilight of a smile: so singularly were its light and darkness blended.

"My dearest Edith rallies me, you see!" said her mother, shaking her head: which shook a little of itself sometimes, as if the palsy twinkled now and then in opposition to the diamonds. "Wicked one!"

"You have been here before, if I am not mistaken?" said Mr. Dombey. Still to Edith.

"Oh, several times. I think we have been everywhere."

"A beautiful country!"

"I suppose it is. Everybody says so."

"Your cousin Feenix raves about it Edith," interposed her mother from her couch.

The daughter slightly turned her graceful head, and raising her eyebrows by a hair's-breadth as if her cousin Feenix were of all the mortal world the least to be regarded, turned her eyes again towards Mr. Dombey.

"I hope, for the credit of my good taste, that I am tired of the neighborhood," she said.

"You have almost reason to be, madam," he replied, glancing at a variety of landscape drawings, of which he had already recognized several as representing neighboring points of view, and which were strewn abundantly about the room, "if these beautiful productions are from your hand."

She gave him no reply, but sat in a disdainful beauty, quite amazing.

"Have they that interest?" said Mr. Dombey. "Are they yours?"

"Yes."

"And you play, I already know."

"Yes."

"And sing."

"Yes."

She answered all these questions with a strange reluctance; and with that remarkable air of opposition to herself, already noticed as belonging to her beauty. Yet she was not embarrassed, but wholly self-possessed. Neither did she seem to wish to avoid the conversation, for she addressed her face, and — so far as she could — her manner also, to him; and continued to do so, when he was silent.

"You have many resources against weariness at least," said Mr. Dombey.

"Whatever their efficiency may be," she returned, "you know them all now. I have no more."

"May I hope to prove them all?" said Mr. Dombey, with solemn gallantry, laying down a drawing he had held, and motioning towards the harp.

"Oh certainly! If you desire it!"

She rose as she spoke, and crossing by her mother's couch, and directing a stately look towards her, which was instantaneous in its duration, but inclusive (if any one had seen it) of a multitude of expressions, among which that of the twilight smile, without the smile itself, overshadowed all the rest, went out of the room.

The major, who was quite forgiven by this time, had wheeled a little table up to Cleopatra, and was sitting

down to play piquet with her. Mr. Dombey, not knowing the game, sat down to watch them for his edification until Edith should return.

"We are going to have some music, Mr. Dombey, I hope?" said Cleopatra.

"Mrs. Granger has been kind enough to promise so," said Mr. Dombey.

"Ah! That's very nice. Do you propose, major?"

"No, ma'am," said the major. "Couldn't do it."

"You're a barbarous being," replied the lady, "and my hand's destroyed. You are fond of music, Mr. Dombey?"

"Eminently so," was Mr. Dombey's answer.

"Yes. It's very nice," said Cleopatra, looking at her cards. "So much heart in it — undeveloped recollections of a previous state of existence — and all that — which is so truly charming. Do you know," simpered Cleopatra, reversing the knave of clubs, who had come into her game with his heels uppermost, "that if anything could tempt me to put a period to my life, it would be curiosity to find out what it's all about, and what it means; there are so many provoking mysteries, really, that are hidden from us. Major, you to play!"

The major played; and Mr. Dombey looking on for his instruction, would soon have been in a state of dire confusion, but that he gave no attention to the game whatever, and sat wondering instead when Edith would come back.

She came at last, and sat down to her harp, and Mr. Dombey rose and stood beside her, listening. He had little taste for music, and no knowledge of the strain she played, but he saw her bending over it, and perhaps he heard among the sounding strings some distant music of

his own, that tamed the monster of the iron road, and made it less inexorable.

Cleopatra had a sharp eye, verily, at piquet. It glistened like a bird's, and did not fix itself upon the game, but pierced the room from end to end, and gleamed on harp, performer, listener, everything.

When the haughty beauty had concluded, she arose, and receiving Mr. Dombey's thanks and compliments in exactly the same manner as before, went with scarcely any pause, to the piano, and began there.

Edith Granger, any song but that! Edith Granger, you are very handsome, and your touch upon the keys is brilliant, and your voice is deep and rich; but not the air that his neglected daughter sang to his dead son!

Alas, he knows it not; and if he did, what air of hers would stir him, rigid man! Sleep, lonely Florence, sleep! Peace in thy dreams, although the night has turned dark, and the clouds are gathering, and threaten to discharge themselves in hail!

CHAPTER XXII.

A TRIFLE OF MANAGEMENT BY MR. CARKER THE MANAGER.

Mr. Carker the manager sat at his desk, smooth and soft as usual, reading those letters which were reserved for him to open, backing them occasionally with such memoranda and references as their business purport required, and parcelling them out into little heaps for distribution through the several departments of the house. The post had come in heavy that morning, and Mr. Carker the manager had a good deal to do.

The general action of a man so engaged — pausing to look over a bundle of papers in his hand, dealing them round in various portions, taking up another bundle and examining its contents with knitted brows and pursed-out lips — dealing, and sorting, and pondering by turns — would easily suggest some whimsical resemblance to a player at cards. The face of Mr. Carker the manager was in good keeping with such a fancy. It was the face of a man who studied his play, warily: who made himself master of all the strong and weak points of the game: who registered the cards in his mind as they fell about him, knew exactly what was on them, what they missed, and what they made: who was crafty to find out what the other players held, and who never betrayed his own hand.

The letters were in various languages, but Mr. Carker

the manager read them all. If there had been anything in the offices of Dombey and Son that he could *not* read, there would have been a card wanting in the pack. He read almost at a glance, and made combinations of one letter with another and one business with another as he went on, adding new matter to the heaps — much as a man would know the cards at sight, and work out their combinations in his mind after they were turned. Something too deep for a partner, and much too deep for an adversary, Mr. Carker the manager sat in the rays of the sun that came down slanting on him through the skylight, playing his game alone.

And although it is not among the instincts wild or domestic of the cat tribe to play at cards, feline from sole to crown was Mr. Carker the manager, as he basked in the strip of summer-light and warmth that shone upon his table and the ground as if they were a crooked dial-plate, and himself the only figure on it. With hair and whiskers deficient in color at all times, but feebler than common in the rich sunshine, and more like the coat of a sandy tortoise-shell cat; with long nails, nicely pared, and sharpened; with a natural antipathy to any speck of dirt, which made him pause sometimes and watch the falling motes of dust, and rub them off his smooth white hand or glossy linen: Mr. Carker the manager, sly of manner, sharp of tooth, soft of foot, watchful of eye, oily of tongue, cruel of heart, nice of habit, sat with a dainty steadfastness and patience at his work, as if he were waiting at a mouse's hole.

At length the letters were disposed of, excepting one which he reserved for a particular audience. Having locked the more confidential correspondence in a drawer, Mr. Carker the manager rang his bell.

"Why do *you* answer it?" was his reception of his brother.

"The messenger is out, and I am the next," was the submissive reply.

"You are the next?" muttered the manager. "Yes! Creditable to me! There!"

Pointing to the heaps of opened letters, he turned disdainfully away in his elbow-chair, and broke the seal of that one which he held in his hand.

"I am sorry to trouble you, James," said the brother, gathering them up, "but" —

"Oh! You have something to say. I knew that. Well?"

Mr. Carker the manager did not raise his eyes or turn them on his brother, but kept them on his letter, though without opening it.

"Well?" he repeated sharply.

"I am uneasy about Harriet."

"Harriet who? what Harriet? I know nobody of that name."

"She is not well, and has changed very much of late."

"She changed very much, a great many years ago," replied the manager; "and that is all I have to say."

"I think if you would hear me" —

"Why should I hear you, Brother John?" returned the manager, laying a sarcastic emphasis on those two words, and throwing up his head, but not lifting his eyes. "I tell you, Harriet Carker made her choice many years ago between her two brothers. She may repent it, but she must abide by it."

"Don't mistake me. I do not say she *does* repent it. It would be black ingratitude in me to hint at such a

thing," returned the other. "Though believe me, James, I am as sorry for her sacrifice as you."

"As I?" exclaimed the manager. "As I?"

"As sorry for her choice — for what you call her choice — as you are angry at it," said the Junior.

"Angry?" repeated the other, with a wide show of his teeth.

"Displeased. Whatever word you like best. You know my meaning. There is no offence in my intention."

"There is offence in everything you do," replied his brother, glancing at him with a sudden scowl, which in a moment gave place to a wider smile than the last. "Carry those papers away, if you please. I am busy."

His politeness was so much more cutting than his wrath, that the Junior went to the door. But stopping at it, and looking round, he said:

"When Harriet tried in vain to plead for me with you, on your first just indignation, and my first disgrace; and when she left you, James, to follow my broken fortunes, and devote herself, in her mistaken affection, to a ruined brother, because without her he had no one, and was lost; she was young and pretty. I think if you could see her now — if you would go and see her — she would move your admiration and compassion."

The manager inclined his head, and showed his teeth, as who should say, in answer to some careless small-talk, "Dear me! Is that the case?" but said never a word.

"We thought in those days: you and I both: that she would marry young, and lead a happy and light-hearted life," pursued the other. "Oh if you knew how cheerfully she cast those hopes away; how cheerfully

she has gone forward on the path she took, and never once looked back; you never could say again that her name was strange in your ears. Never!"

Again the manager inclined his head, and showed his teeth, and seemed to say, "Remarkable indeed! You quite surprise me!" And again he uttered never a word.

"May I go on?" said John Carker, mildly.

"On your way?" replied his smiling brother. "If you will have the goodness."

John Carker, with a sigh, was passing slowly out at the door, when his brother's voice detained him for a moment on the threshold.

"If she has gone and goes her own way cheerfully," he said, throwing the still unfolded letter on his desk, and putting his hands firmly in his pockets, "you may tell her that I go as cheerfully on mine. If she has never once looked back, you may tell her that I have, sometimes, to recall her taking part with you, and that my resolution is no easier to wear away;" he smiled very sweetly here; "than marble."

"I tell her nothing of you. We never speak about you. Once a year, on your birthday, Harriet says always, 'Let us remember James by name, and wish him happy,' but we say no more."

"Tell it then, if you please," returned the other, "to yourself. You can't repeat it too often, as a lesson to you to avoid the subject in speaking to me. I know no Harriet Carker. There is no such person. *You* may have a sister; make much of her. I have none."

Mr. Carker the manager took up the letter again, and waved it with a smile of mock courtesy towards the door. Unfolding it as his brother withdrew, and looking darkly after him as he left the room, he once more

turned round in his elbow-chair, and applied himself to a diligent perusal of its contents.

It was in the writing of his great chief, Mr. Dombey, and dated from Leamington. Though he was a quick reader of all other letters, Mr. Carker read this slowly; weighing the words as he went, and bringing every tooth in his head to bear upon them. When he had read it through once, he turned it over again, and picked out these passages. "I find myself benefited by the change, and am not yet inclined to name any time for my return." "I wish, Carker, you would arrange to come down once and see me here, and let me know how things are going on, in person." "I omitted to speak to you about young Gay. If not gone per Son and Heir, or if Son and Heir still lying in the Docks, appoint some other young man and keep him in the city for the present. I am not decided." "Now that's unfortunate;" said Mr. Carker the manager, expanding his mouth, as if it were made of india-rubber: "for he's far away!"

Still that passage which was in a postscript, attracted his attention and his teeth, once more.

"I think," he said, "my good friend Captain Cuttle mentioned something about being towed along in the wake of that day. What a pity he's so far away!"

He refolded the letter, and was sitting trifling with it standing it long-wise and broad-wise on his table, and turning it over and over on all sides — doing pretty much the same thing perhaps, by its contents — when Mr. Perch the messenger knocked softly at the door, and coming in on tiptoe, bending his body at every step as if it were the delight of his life to bow, laid some papers on the table.

"Would you please to be engaged, sir?" asked Mr.

Perch, rubbing his hands, and deferentially putting his head on one side, like a man who felt he had no business to hold it up in such a presence, and would keep it as much out of the way as possible.

"Who wants me?"

"Why, sir," said Mr. Perch, in a soft voice, "really nobody, sir, to speak of at present. Mr. Gills the Ship's Instrument-maker, sir, has looked in about a little matter of payment, he says; but I mentioned to him, sir, that you was engaged several deep; several deep."

Mr. Perch coughed once behind his hand, and waited for further orders.

"Anybody else?"

"Well, sir," said Mr. Perch, "I wouldn't of my own self take the liberty of mentioning, sir, that there was anybody else; but that same young lad that was here yesterday, sir, and last week, has been hanging about the place; and it looks, sir," added Mr. Perch, stopping to shut the door, "dreadful unbusiness-like to see him whistling to the sparrows down the court, and making of 'em answer him."

"You said he wanted something to do, didn't you, Perch?" asked Mr. Carker, leaning back in his chair, and looking at that officer.

"Why, sir," said Mr. Perch, coughing behind his hand again, "his expression certainly were that he was in wants of a sitiwation, and that he considered something might be done for him about the Docks, being used to fishing with a rod and line: but" — Mr. Perch shook his head very dubiously indeed.

"What does he say when he comes?" asked Mr. Carker.

"Indeed, sir," said Mr. Perch, coughing another cough behind his hand, which was always his resource

as an expression of humility when nothing else occurred to him, "his observation generally air that he would humbly wish to see one of the gentlemen, and that he wants to earn a living. But you see, sir," added Perch, dropping his voice to a whisper, and turning, in the inviolable nature of his confidence, to give the door a thrust with his hand and knee, as if that would shut it any more when it was shut already, "it's hardly to be bore, sir, that a common lad like that should come a prowling here, and saying that his mother nursed our House's young gentleman, and that he hopes our House will give him a chance on that account. I am sure, sir," observed Mr. Perch, "that although Mrs. Perch was at that time nursing as thriving a little girl, sir, as we've ever took the liberty of adding to our family, I wouldn't have made so free as drop a hint of her being capable of imparting nourishment, not if it was ever so!"

Mr. Carker grinned at him like a shark, but in an absent, thoughtful manner.

"Whether," submitted Mr. Perch, after a short silence and another cough, "it mightn't be best for me to tell him, that if he was seen here any more he would be given into custody; and to keep to it! With respect to bodily fear," said Mr. Perch, "I'm so timid, myself, by nature, sir, and my nerves is so unstrung by Mrs. Perch's state, that I could take my affidavit easy."

"Let me see this fellow, Perch," said Mr. Carker. "Bring him in!"

"Yes, sir. Begging your pardon, sir," said Mr. Perch, hesitating at the door, "he's rough, sir, in appearance."

"Never mind. If he's there, bring him in. I'll see Mr. Gills directly. Ask him to wait!"

Mr. Perch bowed; and shutting the door as precisely and carefully as if he were not coming back for a week, went on his quest among the sparrows in the court. While he was gone, Mr. Carker assumed his favorite attitude before the fire-place, and stood looking at the door; presenting with his under-lip tucked into the smile that showed his whole row of upper teeth, a singularly crouching appearance.

The messenger was not long in returning, followed by a pair of heavy boots that came bumping along the passage like boxes. With the unceremonious words "Come along with you!" — a very unusual form of introduction from his lips — Mr. Perch then ushered into the presence a strong-built lad of fifteen, with a round red face, a round sleek head, round black eyes, round limbs, and round body, who, to carry out the general rotundity of his appearance, had a round hat in his hand, without a particle of brim to it.

Obedient to a nod from Mr. Carker, Perch had no sooner confronted the visitor with that gentleman than he withdrew. The moment they were face to face alone, Mr. Carker, without a word of preparation, took him by the throat, and shook him until his head seemed loose upon his shoulders.

The boy, who in the midst of his astonishment could not help staring wildly at the gentleman with so many white teeth, who was choking him, and at the office-walls, as though determined, if he *were* choked, that his last look should be at the mysteries for his intrusion into which he was paying such a severe penalty, at last contrived to utter —

"Come, sir! You let me alone, will you!"

"Let you alone!" said Mr. Carker. "What! I

have got you, have I?" There was no doubt of that, and tightly too. "You dog," said Mr. Carker, through his set jaws, "I'll strangle you!"

Biler whimpered, would he though? oh, no he wouldn't — and what was he doing of — and why didn't he strangle somebody of his own size and not *him:* but Biler was quelled by the extraordinary nature of his reception, and, as his head became stationary, and he looked the gentleman in the face, or rather in the teeth, and saw him snarling at him, he so far forgot his manhood as to cry.

"I haven't done nothing to you, sir," said Biler, otherwise Rob, otherwise Grinder, and always Toodle.

"You young scoundrel!" replied Mr. Carker, slowly releasing him, and moving back a step into his favorite position. "What do you mean by daring to come here?"

"I didn't mean no harm, sir," whimpered Rob, putting one hand to his throat, and the knuckles of the other to his eyes. "I'll never come again, sir. I only wanted work."

"Work, young Cain that you are!" repeated Mr. Carker, eying him narrowly. "A'n't you the idlest vagabond in London?"

The impeachment, while it much affected Mr. Toodle junior, attached to his character so justly, that he could not say a word in denial. He stood looking at the gentleman, therefore, with a frightened, self-convicted, and remorseful air. As to his looking at him, it may be observed that he was fascinated by Mr. Carker and never took his round eyes off him for an instant.

"A'n't you a thief?" said Mr. Carker, with his hands behind him in his pockets.

"No, sir," pleaded Rob.

"You are!" said Mr. Carker.

"I a'n't indeed, sir," whimpered Rob. "I never did such a thing as thieve, sir, if you'll believe me. I know I've been going wrong, sir, ever since I took to bird-catching and walking-matching. I'm sure a cove might think," said Mr. Toodle junior, with a burst of penitence, "that singing-birds was innocent company, but nobody knows what harm is in them little creeturs and what they brings you down to."

They seemed to have brought *him* down to a velveteen jacket and trousers very much the worse for wear, a particularly small red waistcoat like a gorget, an interval of blue check, and the hat before-mentioned.

"I a'n't been home twenty times since them birds got their will of me," said Rob, "and that's ten months. How can I go home when everybody's miserable to see me! I wonder," said Biler, blubbering outright, and smearing his eyes with his coat-cuff, "that I haven't been and drownded myself over and over again."

All of which, including his expression of surprise at not having achieved this last scarce performance, the boy said, just as if the teeth of Mr. Carker drew it out of him, and he had no power of concealing anything with that battery of attraction in full play.

"You're a nice young gentleman!" said Mr. Carker, shaking his head at him. "There's hemp-seed sown for *you*, my fine fellow!"

"I'm sure, sir," returned the wretched Biler, blubbering again, and again having recourse to his coat-cuff: "I shouldn't care, sometimes, if it was growed too. My misfortunes all began in wagging, sir; but what could I do, exceptin' wag?"

"Excepting what?" said Mr. Carker.

"Wag, sir. Wagging from school."

"Do you mean pretending to go there, and not going?" said Mr. Carker.

"Yes, sir, that's wagging, sir," returned the quondam Grinder, much affected. "I was chivied through the streets, sir, when I went there, and pounded when I got there. So I wagged, and hid myself, and that began it."

"And you mean to tell me," said Mr. Carker, taking him by the throat again, holding him out at arm's-length, and surveying him in silence for some moments, "that you want a place, do you?"

"I should be thankful to be tried, sir," returned Toodle junior, faintly.

Mr. Carker the manager pushed him backwards into a corner — the boy submitting quietly, hardly venturing to breathe, and never once removing his eyes from his face — and rang the bell.

"Tell Mr. Gills to come here."

Mr. Perch was too deferential to express surprise or recognition of the figure in the corner: and Uncle Sol appeared immediately.

"Mr. Gills!" said Carker, with a smile, "sit down. How do you do? You continue to enjoy your health, I hope?"

"Thank you, sir," returned Uncle Sol, taking out his pocket-book, and handing over some notes as he spoke. "Nothing ails me in body but old age. Twenty-five, sir."

"You are as punctual and exact, Mr. Gills," replied the smiling manager, taking a paper from one of his many drawers, and making an indorsement on it, while Uncle Sol looked over him, "as one of your own chronometers. Quite right."

"The Son and Heir has not been spoken, I find by the list, sir," said Uncle Sol, with a slight addition to the usual tremor in his voice.

"The Son and Heir has not been spoken," returned Carker. "There seems to have been tempestuous weather, Mr. Gills, and she has probably been driven out of her course."

"She is safe, I trust in Heaven!" said old Sol.

"She is safe, I trust in Heaven!" assented Mr. Carker in that voiceless manner of his: which made the observant young Toodle tremble again. "Mr. Gills," he added aloud, throwing himself back in his chair, "you must miss your nephew very much?"

Uncle Sol, standing by him, shook his head and heaved a deep sigh.

"Mr. Gills," said Carker, with his soft hand playing round his mouth, and looking up into the instrument-maker's face, "it would be company to you to have a young fellow in your shop just now, and it would be obliging me if you would give one house-room for the present. No, to be sure," he added quickly, in anticipation of what the old man was going to say, "there's not much business doing there, I know: but you can make him clean the place out, polish up the instruments; drudge, Mr. Gills. That's the lad!"

Sol Gills pulled down his spectacles from his forehead to his eyes, and looked at Toodle junior standing upright in the corner: his head presenting the appearance (which it always did) of having been newly drawn out of a bucket of cold water; his small waistcoat rising and falling quickly in the play of his emotions; and his eyes intently fixed on Mr. Carker, without the least reference to his proposed master.

"Will you give him house-room, Mr. Gills?" said the manager.

Old Sol, without being quite enthusiastic on the subject, replied that he was glad of any opportunity, however slight, to oblige Mr. Carker, whose wish on such a point was a command: and that the Wooden Midshipman would consider himself happy to receive in his berth any visitor of Mr. Carker's selecting.

Mr. Carker bared himself to the tops and bottoms of his gums: making the watchful Toodle junior tremble more and more: and acknowledged the instrument-maker's politeness in his most affable manner.

"I'll dispose of him so, then, Mr. Gills," he answered, rising, and shaking the old man by the hand, "until I make up my mind what to do with him, and what he deserves. As I consider myself responsible for him, Mr. Gills," here he smiled a wide smile at Rob, who shook before it: "I shall be glad if you'll look sharply after him, and report his behavior to me. I'll ask a question or two of his parents as I ride home this afternoon — respectable people — to confirm some particulars in his own account of himself; and that done, Mr. Gills, I'll send him round to you to-morrow morning. Good-by!"

His smile at parting was so full of teeth, that it confused old Sol, and made him vaguely uncomfortable. He went home, thinking of raging seas, foundering ships, drowning men, an ancient bottle of Madeira never brought to light, and other dismal matter.

"Now, boy!" said Mr. Carker, putting his hand on young Toodle's shoulder, and bringing him out into the middle of the room. "You have heard me?"

Rob said, "Yes, sir."

"Perhaps you understand," pursued his patron, "that if you ever deceive or play tricks with me, you had better have drowned yourself, indeed, once for all before you came here?"

There was nothing in any branch of mental acquisition that Rob seemed to understand better than that.

"If you have lied to me," said Mr. Carker, "in anything, never come in my way again. If not, you may let me find you waiting for me somewhere near your mother's house this afternoon. I shall leave this at five o'clock, and ride there on horseback. Now, give me the address."

Rob repeated it slowly, as Mr. Carker wrote it down. Rob even spelt it over a second time, letter by letter, as if he thought that the omission of a dot or scratch would lead to his destruction. Mr. Carker then handed him out of the room: and Rob, keeping his round eyes fixed upon his patron to the last, vanished for the time being.

Mr. Carker the manager did a great deal of business in the course of the day, and bestowed his teeth upon a great many people. In the office, in the court, in the street, and on 'Change, they glistened and bristled to a terrible extent. Five o'clock arriving, and with it Mr. Carker's bay horse, they got on horseback, and went gleaming up Cheapside.

As no one can easily ride fast, even if inclined to do so, through the press and throng of the city at that hour, and as Mr. Carker was not inclined, he went leisurely along, picking his way among the carts and carriages, avoiding whenever he could the wetter and more dirty places in the over-watered road, and taking infinite pains to keep himself and his steed clean.

Glancing at the passers-by while he was thus ambling on his way, he suddenly encountered the round eyes of the sleek-headed Rob intently fixed upon his face, as if they had never been taken off, while the boy himself, with a pocket-handkerchief twisted up like a speckled eel and girded round his waist, made a very conspicuous demonstration of being prepared to attend upon him, at whatever pace he might think proper to go.

This attention however flattering, being one of an unusual kind, and attracting some notice from the other passengers, Mr. Carker took advantage of a clearer thoroughfare and a cleaner road, and broke into a trot. Rob immediately did the same. Mr. Carker presently tried a canter; Rob was still in attendance. Then a short gallop; it was all one to the boy. Whenever Mr. Carker turned his eyes to that side of the road, he still saw Toodle junior holding his course, apparently without distress, and working himself along by the elbows after the most approved manner of professional gentlemen who get over the ground for wagers.

Ridiculous as this attendance was, it was a sign of an influence established over the boy, and therefore Mr. Carker, affecting not to notice it, rode away into the neighborhood of Mr. Toodle's house. On his slackening his pace here, Rob appeared before him to point out the turnings; and when he called to a man at a neighboring gateway to hold his horse, pending his visit to the Buildings that had succeeded Staggs's Gardens, Rob dutifully held the stirrup, while the manager dismounted.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Carker, taking him by the shoulder, "come along!"

The prodigal son was evidently nervous of visiting the

parental abode: but Mr. Carker pushing him on before, he had nothing for it but to open the right door, and suffer himself to be walked into the midst of his brothers and sisters, mustered in overwhelming force round the family tea-table. At sight of the prodigal in the grasp of a stranger, these tender relations united in a general howl, which smote upon the prodigal's breast so sharply when he saw his mother stand up among them, pale and trembling with the baby in her arms, that he lent his own voice to the chorus.

Nothing doubting now that the stranger, if not Mr. Ketch in person, was one of that company, the whole of the young family wailed the louder, while its more infantine members, unable to control the transports of emotion appertaining to their time of life, threw themselves on their backs like young birds when terrified by a hawk, and kicked violently. At length, poor Polly making herself audible, said, with quivering lips, "O Rob, my poor boy, what have you done at last!"

"Nothing, mother," cried Rob, in a piteous voice, "ask the gentleman!"

"Don't be alarmed," said Mr. Carker, "I want to do him good."

At this announcement, Polly, who had not cried yet, began to do so. The elder Toodles, who appeared to have been meditating a rescue, unclinched their fists. The younger Toodles clustered round their mother's gown, and peeped from under their own chubby arms at their desperado brother and his unknown friend. Everybody blessed the gentleman with the beautiful teeth, who wanted to do good.

"This fellow," said Mr. Carker to Polly, giving him a gentle shake, "is your son, eh, ma'am?"

"Yes, sir," sobbed Polly, with a courtesy; "yes, sir."

"A bad son, I am afraid?" said Mr. Carker.

"Never a bad son to me, sir," returned Polly.

"To whom then?" demanded Mr. Carker.

"He has been a little wild, sir," replied Polly, checking the baby, who was making convulsive efforts with his arms and legs to launch himself on Biler, through the ambient air, "and has gone with wrong companions; but I hope he has seen the misery of that, sir, and will do well again."

Mr. Carker looked at Polly, and the clean room and the clean children, and the simple Toodle face, combined of father and mother, that was reflected and repeated everywhere about him: and seemed to have achieved the real purpose of his visit.

"Your husband, I take it, is not at home?" he said.

"No, sir," replied Polly. "He's down the line at present."

The prodigal Rob seemed very much relieved to hear it: though still in the absorption of all his faculties in his patron, he hardly took his eyes from Mr. Carker's face unless for a moment at a time to steal a sorrowful glance at his mother.

"Then," said Mr. Carker, "I'll tell you how I have stumbled on this boy of yours, and who I am, and what I am going to do for him."

This Mr. Carker did, in his own way: saying that he at first intended to have accumulated nameless terrors on his presumptuous head, for coming to the whereabout of Dombey and Son. That he had relented, in consideration of his youth, his professed contrition, and his friends. That he was afraid he took a rash step in doing anything for the boy, and one that might expose him to the cen-

sure of the prudent; but that he did it of himself and for himself, and risked the consequences single-handed; and that his mother's past connection with Mr. Dombey's family had nothing to do with it, and that Mr. Dombey had nothing to do with it, but that he, Mr. Carker, was the be-all, and the end-all of this business. Taking great credit to himself for his goodness, and receiving no less from all the family then present, Mr. Carker signified, indirectly but still pretty plainly, that Rob's implicit fidelity, attachment, and devotion, were forevermore his due, and the least homage he could receive. And with this great truth Rob himself was so impressed, that, standing gazing on his patron with tears rolling down his cheeks, he nodded his shiny head until it seemed almost as loose as it had done under the same patron's hands that morning.

Polly, who had passed Heaven knows how many sleepless nights on account of this her dissipated first-born, and had not seen him for weeks and weeks, could have almost kneeled to Mr. Carker the manager, as to a good spirit — in spite of his teeth. But Mr. Carker rising to depart, she only thanked him with her mother's prayers and blessings; thanks so rich when paid out of the heart's mint, especially for any service Mr. Carker had rendered, that he might have given back a large amount of change, and yet been overpaid.

As that gentleman made his way among the crowding children to the door, Rob retreated on his mother, and took her and the baby in the same repentant hug.

"I'll try hard, dear mother, now. Upon my soul I will!" said Rob.

"Oh do, my dear boy! I am sure you will, for our sakes and your own!" cried Polly, kissing him. "But

you're coming back to speak to me, when you have seen the gentleman away?"

"I don't know, mother." Rob hesitated, and looked down. "Father — when's he coming home?"

"Not till two o'clock to-morrow morning."

"I'll come back, mother dear!" cried Rob. And passing through the shrill cry of his brothers and sisters in reception of this promise, he followed Mr. Carker out.

"What!" said Mr. Carker, who had heard this. "You have a bad father, have you?"

"No, sir!" returned Rob, amazed. "There a'n't a better nor a kinder father going, than mine is."

"Why don't you want to see him then?" inquired his patron.

"There's such a difference between a father and a mother, sir," said Rob, after faltering for a moment. "He couldn't hardly believe yet that I was going to do better — though I know he'd try to — but a mother — *she* always believes what's good, sir; at least I know my mother does, God bless her!"

Mr. Carker's mouth expanded, but he said no more until he was mounted on his horse, and had dismissed the man who held it, when, looking down from the saddle steadily into the attentive and watchful face of the boy, he said:

"You'll come to me to-morrow morning, and you shall be shown where that old gentleman lives; that old gentleman who was with me this morning; where you are going, as you heard me say."

"Yes, sir," returned Rob.

"I have a great interest in that old gentleman, and in serving him, you serve me, boy, do you understand? Well," he added, interrupting him, for he saw his round

face brighten when he was told that: "I see you do. I want to know all about that old gentleman, and how he goes on from day to day — for I am anxious to be of service to him — and especially who comes there to see him. Do you understand?"

Rob nodded his steadfast face, and said "Yes, sir," again.

"I should like to know that he has friends who are attentive to him, and that they don't desert him — for he lives very much alone now, poor fellow; but that they are fond of him, and of his nephew who has gone abroad. There is a very young lady who may perhaps come to see him. I want particularly to know all about *her*."

"I'll take care, sir," said the boy.

"And take care," returned his patron, bending forward to advance his grinning face closer to the boy's, and pat him on the shoulder with the handle of his whip: "take care you talk about affairs of mine to nobody but me."

"To nobody in the world, sir," replied Rob, shaking his head.

"Neither there," said Mr. Carker, pointing to the place they had just left, "nor anywhere else. I'll try how true and grateful you can be. I'll prove you!" Making this, by his display of teeth and by the action of his head, as much a threat as a promise, he turned from Rob's eyes, which were nailed upon him as if he had won the boy by a charm, body and soul, and rode away. But again becoming conscious, after trotting a short distance, that his devoted henchman, girt as before, was yielding him the same attendance, to the great amusement of sundry spectators, he reined up, and or-

dered him off. To insure his obedience, he turned in the saddle and watched him as he retired. It was curious to see that even then Rob could not keep his eyes wholly averted from his patron's face, but, constantly turning and turning again to look after him, involved himself in a tempest of buffetings and jostlings from the other passengers in the street: of which, in the pursuit of the one paramount idea, he was perfectly heedless.

Mr. Carker the manager rode on a foot pace, with the easy air of one who had performed all the business of the day in a satisfactory manner, and got it comfortably off his mind. Complacent and affable as man could be, Mr. Carker picked his way along the streets and hummed a soft tune as he went. He seemed to purr: he was so glad.

And in some sort, Mr. Carker, in his fancy, basked upon a hearth too. Coiled up snugly at certain feet, he was ready for a spring, or for a tear, or for a scratch, or for a velvet touch, as the humor took him and occasion served. Was there any bird in a cage, that came in for a share of his regards?

"A very young lady!" thought Mr. Carker the manager, through his song. "Ay! when I saw her last, she was a little child. With dark eyes and hair, I recollect, and a good face; a very good face! I dare say she's pretty."

More affable and pleasant yet, and humming his song until his many teeth vibrated to it, Mr. Carker picked his way along, and turned at last into the shady street where Mr. Dombey's house stood. He had been so busy, winding webs round good faces, and obscuring them with meshes, that he hardly thought of being

at this point of his ride, until, glancing down the cold perspective of tall houses, he reined in his horse quickly within a few yards of the door. But to explain why Mr. Carker reined in his horse quickly, and what he looked at in no small surprise, a few digressive words are necessary.

Mr. Toots, emancipated from the Blimber thraldom and coming into the possession of a certain portion of his worldly wealth, "which," as he had been wont, during his last half-year's probation, to communicate to Mr. Feeder every evening as a new discovery, "the executors couldn't keep him out of," had applied himself, with great diligence, to the science of Life. Fired with a noble emulation to pursue a brilliant and distinguished career, Mr. Toots had furnished a choice set of apartments; had established among them a sporting bower, embellished with the portraits of winning horses, in which he took no particle of interest; and a divan, which made him poorly. In this delicious abode, Mr. Toots devoted himself to the cultivation of those gentle arts which refine and humanize existence, his chief instructor in which was an interesting character called the Game Chicken, who was always to be heard of at the bar of the Black Badger, wore a shaggy white great-coat in the warmest weather, and knocked Mr. Toots about the head three times a week, for the small consideration of ten and six per visit.

The Game Chicken, who was quite the Apollo of Mr. Toots's Pantheon, had introduced to him a marker who taught billiards, a Life Guard who taught fencing, a jobmaster who taught riding, a Cornish gentleman who was up to anything in the athletic line, and two or three other friends connected no less intimately with the fine

arts. Under whose auspices Mr. Toots could hardly fail to improve apace, and under whose tuition he went to work.

But, however it came about, it came to pass, even while these gentlemen had the gloss of novelty upon them, that Mr. Toots felt, he didn't know how, unsettled and uneasy. There were husks in his corn, that even Game Chickens couldn't peck up; gloomy giants in his leisure, that even Game Chickens couldn't knock down. Nothing seemed to do Mr. Toots so much good as incessantly leaving cards at Mr. Dombey's door. No tax-gatherer in the British dominions — that wide-spread territory on which the sun never sets, and where the tax-gatherer never goes to bed — was more regular and persevering in his calls than Mr. Toots.

Mr. Toots never went up-stairs; and always performed the same ceremonies, richly dressed for the purpose, at the hall-door.

"Oh! Good-morning!" would be Mr. Toots's first remark to the servant. "For Mr. Dombey," would be Mr. Toots's next remark, as he handed in a card. "For Miss Dombey," would be his next, as he handed in another.

Mr. Toots would then turn round as if to go away; but the man knew him by this time, and knew he wouldn't.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Mr. Toots would say, as if a thought had suddenly descended on him. "Is the young woman at home?"

The man would rather think she was, but wouldn't quite know. Then he would ring a bell that rang up-stairs, and would look up the staircase, and would say, yes she *was* at home, and was coming down. Then

Miss Nipper would appear, and the man would retire.

"Oh! How de do?" Mr. Toots would say, with a chuckle and a blush.

Susan would thank him, and say she was very well.

"How's Diogenes going on?" would be Mr. Toots's second interrogation.

Very well indeed. Miss Florence was fonder and fonder of him every day. Mr. Toots was sure to hail this with a burst of chuckles, like the opening of a bottle of some effervescent beverage.

"Miss Florence is quite well, sir," Susan would add.

"Oh, it's of no consequence, thank'ee," was the invariable reply of Mr. Toots; and when he had said so, he always went away very fast.

Now it is certain that Mr. Toots had a filmy something in his mind, which led him to conclude that if he could aspire successfully in the fulness of time, to the hand of Florence, he would be fortunate and blest. It is certain that Mr. Toots, by some remote and roundabout road, had got to that point, and that there he made a stand. His heart was wounded; he was touched; he was in love. He had made a desperate attempt, one night, and had sat up all night for the purpose, to write an acrostic on Florence, which affected him to tears in the conception. But he never proceeded in the execution further than the words, "For when I gaze" — the flow of imagination in which he had previously written down the initial letters of the other seven lines, deserting him at that point.

Beyond devising that very artful and politic measure of leaving a card for Mr. Dombey daily, the brain of Mr. Toots had not worked much in reference to the

subject that held his feelings prisoner. But deep consideration at length assured Mr. Toots that an important step to gain, was the conciliation of Miss Susan Nipper, preparatory to giving her some inkling of his state of mind.

A little light and playful gallantry towards this lady seemed the means to employ in that early chapter of the history, for winning her to his interests. Not being able quite to make up his mind about it, he consulted the Chicken — without taking that gentleman into his confidence; merely informing him that a friend in Yorkshire had written to him (Mr. Toots) for his opinion on such a question. The Chicken replying that his opinion always was, "Go in and win," and further, "When your man's before you and your work cut out, go in and do it," Mr. Toots considered this a figurative way of supporting his own view of the case, and heroically resolved to kiss Miss Nipper next day.

Upon the next day, therefore, Mr. Toots, putting into requisition some of the greatest marvels that Burgess and Co. had ever turned out, went off to Mr. Dombey's upon this design. But his heart failed him so much as he approached the scene of action, that, although he arrived on the ground at three o'clock in the afternoon, it was six before he knocked at the door.

Everything happened as usual, down to the point when Susan said her young mistress was well, and Mr. Toots said it was of no consequence. To her amazement, Mr. Toots, instead of going off like a rocket, after that observation, lingered and chuckled.

"Perhaps you'd like to walk up-stairs, sir?" said Susan.

"Well I think I will come in!" said Mr. Toots.

But instead of walking up-stairs, the bold Toots made an awkward plunge at Susan when the door was shut, and embracing that fair creature, kissed her on the cheek.

"Go along with you!" cried Susan, "or I'll tear your eyes out."

"Just another!" said Mr. Toots.

"Go along with you!" exclaimed Susan, giving him a push. "Innocents like you, too! Who'll begin next? Go along, sir!"

Susan was not in any serious strait, for she could hardly speak for laughing; but Diogenes, on the staircase, hearing a rustling against the wall, and a shuffling of feet, and seeing through the banisters that there was some contention going on, and foreign invasion in the house, formed a different opinion, dashed down to the rescue, and in the twinkling of an eye had Mr. Toots by the leg.

Susan screamed, laughed, opened the street-door, and ran down-stairs; the bold Toots tumbled staggering out into the street, with Diogenes holding on to one leg of his pantaloons, as if Burgess and Co. were his cooks, and had provided that dainty morsel for his holiday entertainment; Diogenes shaken off, rolled over and over in the dust, got up again, whirled round the giddy Toots and snapped at him: and all this turmoil, Mr. Carker, reining up his horse and sitting a little at a distance, saw, to his amazement, issue from the stately house of Mr. Dombey.

Mr. Carker remained watching the discomfited Toots, when Diogenes was called in, and the door shut: and while that gentleman, taking refuge in a door-way near at hand, bound up the torn leg of his pantaloons with a

costly silk handkerchief that had formed part of his expensive outfit for the adventure.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Mr. Carker, riding up, with his most propitiatory smile. "I hope you are not hurt?"

"Oh no, thank you," replied Mr. Toots, raising his flushed face, "it's of no consequence." Mr. Toots would have signified, if he could, that he liked it very much.

"If the dog's teeth have entered the leg, sir" — began Carker, with a display of his own.

"No, thank you," said Mr. Toots, "it's all quite right. It's very comfortable, thank you."

"I have the pleasure of knowing Mr. Dombey," observed Carker.

"Have you though?" rejoined the blushing Toots.

"And you will allow me, perhaps, to apologize, in his absence," said Mr. Carker, taking off his hat, "for such a misadventure, and to wonder how it can possibly have happened."

Mr. Toots is so much gratified by this politeness, and the lucky chance of making friends with a friend of Mr. Dombey, that he pulls out his card-case, which he never loses an opportunity of using, and hands his name and address to Mr. Carker: who responds to that courtesy by giving him his own, and with that they part.

As Mr. Carker picks his way so softly past the house, glancing up at the windows, and trying to make out the pensive face behind the curtain looking at the children opposite, the rough head of Diogenes came clambering up close by it, and the dog, regardless of all soothing, barks and growls, and makes at him from that height, as if he would spring down and tear him limb from limb.

Well spoken, Di, so near your mistress! Another, and another with your head up, your eyes flashing, and your vexed mouth worrying itself, for want of him! Another, as he picks his way along! You have a good scent, Di, — cats, boy, cats!

CHAPTER XXIII.

FLORENCE SOLITARY, AND THE MIDSHIPMAN MYSTERIOUS.

FLORENCE lived alone in the great dreary house, and day succeeded day, and still she lived alone; and the blank walls looked down upon her with a vacant stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like mind to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

No magic dwelling-place in magic story, shut up in the heart of a thick wood, was ever more solitary and deserted to the fancy, than was her father's mansion in its grim reality, as it stood lowering on the street: always by night, when lights were shining from neighboring windows, a blot upon its scanty brightness; always by day, a frown upon its never-smiling face.

There were not two dragon sentries keeping ward before the gate of this abode, as in magic legend are usually found on duty over the wronged innocence imprisoned; but besides a glowering visage, with its thin lips parted wickedly, that surveyed all comers from above the archway of the door, there was a monstrous fantasy of rusty iron curling and twisting like a petrifaction of an arbor over the threshold, budding in spikes and corkscrew points, and bearing, one on either side, two ominous extinguishers, that seemed to say, "Who enter here, leave light behind!" There were no talismanic characters engraven on the portal, but the house

was now so neglected in appearance, that boys chalked the railings and the pavement — particularly round the corner where the side wall was — and drew ghosts on the stable-door; and being sometimes driven off by Mr. Towlinson, made portraits of him, in return, with his ears growing out horizontally from under his hat. Noise ceased to be, within the shadow of the roof. The brass band that came into the street once a week, in the morning, never brayed a note in at those windows; but all such company, down to a poor little piping organ of weak intellect, with an imbecile party of automaton dancers, waltzing in and out at folding-doors, fell off from it with one accord, and shunned it as a hopeless place.

The spell upon it was more wasting than the spell that used to set enchanted houses sleeping once upon a time, but left their waking freshness unimpaired.

The passive desolation of disuse was everywhere silently manifest about it. Within doors, curtains, drooping heavily, lost their old folds and shapes, and hung like cumbrous palls. Hecatombs of furniture, still piled and covered up, shrunk like imprisoned and forgotten men, and changed insensibly. Mirrors were dim as with the breath of years. Patterns of carpets faded and became perplexed and faint, like the memory of those years' trifling incidents. Boards, starting at unwonted footsteps, creaked and shook. Keys rusted in the locks of doors. Damp started on the walls, and as the stains came out, the pictures seemed to go in and secrete themselves. Mildew and mould began to lurk in closets. Fungus trees grew in corners of the cellars. Dust accumulated, nobody knew whence nor how; spiders, moths, and grubs were heard of every day. An exploratory black-beetle now and then was found im-

movable upon the stairs, or in an upper room, as wondering how he got there. Rats began to squeak and scuffle in the night-time, through dark galleries they mined behind the panelling.

The dreary magnificence of the state rooms, seen imperfectly by the doubtful light admitted through closed shutters, would have answered well enough for an enchanted abode. Such as the tarnished paws of gilded lions, stealthily put out from beneath their wrappers; the marble lineaments of busts on pedestals, fearfully revealing themselves through veils; the clocks that never told the time, or, if wound up by any chance, told it wrong, and struck unearthly numbers, which are not upon the dial; the accidental tinklings among the pendant lustres, more startling than alarm-bells; the softened sounds and laggard air that made their way among these objects, and a phantom crowd of others, shrouded and hooded, and made spectral of shape. But, besides, there was the great staircase, where the lord of the place so rarely set his foot, and by which his little child had gone up to Heaven. There were other staircases and passages where no one went for weeks together; there were two closed rooms associated with dead members of the family, and with whispered recollections of them; and to all the house but Florence, there was a gentle figure moving through the solitude and gloom, that gave to every lifeless thing a touch of present human interest and wonder.

For Florence lived alone in the deserted house, and day succeeded day, and still she lived alone, and the cold walls looked down upon her with a vacant stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like mind to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

The grass began to grow upon the roof, and in the crevices of the basement paving. A scaly crumbling vegetation sprouted round the window-sills. Fragments of mortar lost their hold upon the insides of the unused chimneys, and came dropping down. The two trees with the smoky trunks were blighted high up, and the withered branches domineered above the leaves. Through the whole building, white had turned yellow, yellow nearly black; and since the time when the poor lady died, it had slowly become a dark gap in the long monotonous street.

But Florence bloomed there, like the king's fair daughter in the story. Her books, her music, and her daily teachers, were her only real companions, Susan Nipper and Diogenes excepted: of whom the former, in her attendance on the studies of her young mistress, began to grow quite learned herself, while the latter, softened possibly by the same influences, would lay his head upon the window-ledge, and placidly open and shut his eyes upon the street, all through a summer morning; sometimes pricking up his head to look with great significance after some noisy dog in a cart, who was barking his way along, and sometimes, with an exasperated and unaccountable recollection of his supposed enemy in the neighborhood, rushing to the door, whence after a deafening disturbance, he would come jogging back with a ridiculous complacency that belonged to him, and lay his jaw upon the window-ledge again, with the air of a dog who had done a public service.

So Florence lived in her wilderness of a home, within the circle of her innocent pursuits and thoughts, and nothing harmed her. She could go down to her father's rooms now, and think of him, and suffer her loving heart

humbly to approach him, without fear of repulse. She could look upon the objects that had surrounded him in his sorrow, and could nestle near his chair, and not dread the glance that she so well remembered. She could render him such little tokens of her duty and service, as putting everything in order for him with her own hands, binding little nosegays for his table, changing them as one by one they withered and he did not come back, preparing something for him every day, and leaving some timid mark of her presence near his usual seat. To-day it was a little painted stand for his watch; to-morrow she would be afraid to leave it, and would substitute some other trifle of her making not so likely to attract his eye. Waking in the night, perhaps, she would tremble at the thought of his coming home and angrily rejecting it, and would hurry down with slippered feet and quickly beating heart, and bring it away. At another time, she would only lay her face upon his desk, and leave a kiss there, and a tear.

Still no one knew of this. Unless the household found it out when she was not there — and they all held Mr. Dombey's rooms in awe — it was as deep a secret in her breast as what had gone before it. Florence stole into those rooms at twilight, early in the morning, and at times when meals were served down-stairs. And although they were in every nook the better and the brighter for her care, she entered and passed out as quietly as any sunbeam, excepting that she left her light behind.

Shadowy company attended Florence up and down the echoing house, and sat with her in the dismantled rooms. As if her life were an enchanted vision, there arose out of her solitude ministering thoughts, that made

it fanciful and unreal. She imagined so often what her life would have been if her father could have loved her and she had been a favorite child, that sometimes, for the moment, she almost believed it was so, and, borne on by the current of that pensive fiction, seemed to remember how they had watched her brother in his grave together; how they had freely shared his heart between them; how they were united in the dear remembrance of him; how they often spoke about him yet; and her kind father, looking at her gently, told her of their common hope and trust in God. At other times she pictured to herself her mother yet alive. And oh the happiness of falling on her neck, and clinging to her with the love and confidence of all her soul! And oh the desolation of the solitary house again, with evening coming on, and no one there!

But there was one thought, scarcely shaped out to herself, yet fervent and strong within her, that upheld Florence when she strove, and filled her true young heart, so sorely tried, with constancy of purpose. Into her mind, as into all others contending with the great affliction of our mortal nature, there had stolen solemn wonderings and hopes, arising in the dim world beyond the present life, and murmuring, like faint music, of recognition in the far-off land between her brother and her mother: of some present consciousness in both of her: some love and commiseration for her: and some knowledge of her as she went her way upon the earth. It was a soothing consolation to Florence to give shelter to these thoughts, until one day — it was soon after she had last seen her father in his own room, late at night — the fancy came upon her, that, in weeping for his alienated heart, she might stir the spirits of the dead against

him. Wild, weak, childish, as it may have been to think so, and to tremble at the half-formed thought, it was the impulse of her loving nature; and from that hour Florence strove against the cruel wound in her breast, and tried to think of him whose hand had made it only with hope.

Her father did not know — she held to it from that time — how much she loved him. She was very young, and had no mother, and had never learned, by some fault or misfortune, how to express to him that she loved him. She would be patient, and would try to gain that art in time, and win him to a better knowledge of his only child.

This became the purpose of her life. The morning sun shone down upon the faded house, and found the resolution bright and fresh within the bosom of its solitary mistress. Through all the duties of the day, it animated her; for Florence hoped that the more she knew, and the more accomplished she became, the more glad he would be when he came to know and like her. Sometimes she wondered, with a swelling heart and rising tear, whether she was proficient enough in anything to surprise him when they should become companions. Sometimes she tried to think if there were any kind of knowledge that would bespeak his interest more readily than another. Always: at her books, her music, and her work: in her morning walks, and in her nightly prayers: she had her engrossing aim in view. Strange study for a child, to learn the road to a hard parent's heart!

There were many careless loungers through the street, as the summer evening deepened into night, who glanced across the road at the sombre house, and saw the youth-

ful figure at the window, such a contrast to it, looking upward at the stars as they began to shine, who would have slept the worse if they had known on what design she mused so steadfastly. The reputation of the mansion as a haunted house, would not have been the gayer with some humble dwellers elsewhere, who were struck by its external gloom in passing and repassing on their daily avocations, and so named it, if they could have read its story in the darkening face. But Florence held her sacred purpose, unsuspected and unaided: and studied only how to bring her father to the understanding that she loved him, and made no appeal against him in any wandering thought.

Thus Florence lived alone in the deserted house, and day succeeded day, and still she lived alone, and the monotonous walls looked down upon her with a stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like intent to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

Susan Nipper stood opposite to her young mistress one morning, as she folded and sealed a note she had been writing: and showed in her looks an approving knowledge of its contents.

"Better late than never, dear Miss Floy," said Susan, "and I do say, that even a visit to them old Skettleses will be a Godsend."

"It is very good of Sir Barnet and Lady Skettles, Susan," returned Florence, with a mild correction of that young lady's familiar mention of the family in question, "to repeat their invitation so kindly."

Miss Nipper, who was perhaps the most thorough-going partisan on the face of the earth, and who carried her partisanship into all matters great or small, and perpetually waged war with it against society, screwed up

her lips and shook her head, as a protest against any recognition of disinterestedness in the Skettleses, and a plea in bar that they would have valuable consideration for their kindness in the company of Florence.

"They know what they're about, if ever people did," murmured Miss Nipper, drawing in her breath, "oh! trust them Skettleses for that!"

"I am not very anxious to go to Fulham, Susan, I confess," said Florence thoughtfully; "but it will be right to go. I think it will be better."

"Much better," interposed Susan, with another emphatic shake of her head.

"And so," said Florence, "though I would prefer to have gone when there was no one there, instead of in this vacation time, when it seems there are some young people staying in the house, I have thankfully said yes."

"For which *I* say, Miss Floy, Oh be joyful!" returned Susan. "Ah! h—h!"

This last ejaculation, with which Miss Nipper frequently wound up a sentence, at about that epoch of time, was supposed below the level of the hall to have a general reference to Mr. Dombey, and to be expressive of a yearning in Miss Nipper to favor that gentleman with a piece of her mind. But she never explained it; and it had, in consequence, the charm of mystery, in addition to the advantage of the sharpest expression.

"How long it is before we have any news of Walter, Susan!" observed Florence, after a moment's silence.

"Long indeed, Miss Floy!" replied her maid. "And Perch said, when he came just now to see for letters — but what signifies what *he* says!" exclaimed Susan, reddening and breaking off. "Much *he* knows about it!"

Florence raised her eyes quickly, and a flush overspread her face.

"If I hadn't," said Susan Nipper, evidently struggling with some latent anxiety and alarm, and looking full at her young mistress, while endeavoring to work herself into a state of resentment with the unoffending Mr. Perch's image, "if I hadn't more manliness than that insipidest of his sex, I'd never take pride in my hair again, but turn it up behind my ears, and wear coarse caps, without a bit of border, until death released me from my insignificance, I may not be a Amazon, Miss Floy, and wouldn't so demean myself by such disfigurement, but anyways I'm not a giver up, I hope."

"Give up! What?" cried Florence, with a face of terror.

"Why, nothing, miss," said Susan. "Good gracious, nothing! It's only that wet curl-paper of a man Perch, that any one might almost make away with, with a touch, and really it would be a blessed event for all parties if some one *would* take pity on him, and would have the goodness!"

"Does he give up the ship, Susan?" inquired Florence, very pale.

"No, miss," returned Susan, "I should like to see him make so bold as do it to my face! No, miss, but he goes on about some bothering ginger that Mr. Walter was to send to Mrs. Perch, and shakes his dismal head, and says he hopes it may be coming; anyhow, he says, it can't come now in time for the intended occasion, but may do for next, which really," said Miss Nipper, with aggravated scorn, "puts me out of patience with the man, for though I can bear a great deal, I am not a camel, neither am I," added Susan, after a mo-

ment's consideration, "if I know myself, a dromedary neither."

"What else does he say, Susan?" inquired Florence, earnestly. "Won't you tell me?"

"As if I wouldn't tell you anything, Miss Floy, and everything!" said Susan. "Why miss, he says that there begins to be a general talk about the ship, and that they have never had a ship on that voyage half so long unheard of, and that the captain's wife was at the office yesterday, and seemed a little put out about it, but any one could say that, we knew nearly that before."

"I must visit Walter's uncle," said Florence, hurriedly, "before I leave home. I will go and see him this morning. Let us walk there directly, Susan."

Miss Nipper having nothing to urge against the proposal, but being perfectly acquiescent, they were soon equipped, and in the streets, and on their way towards the little Midshipman.

The state of mind in which poor Walter had gone to Captain Cuttle's, on the day when Brogley the broker came into possession, and when there seemed to him to be an execution in the very steeples, was pretty much the same as that in which Florence now took her way to Uncle Sol's; with this difference, that Florence suffered the added pain of thinking that she had been, perhaps, the innocent occasion of involving Walter in peril, and all to whom he was dear, herself included, in an agony of suspense. For the rest, uncertainty and danger seemed written upon everything. The weathercocks on spires and house-tops were mysterious with hints of stormy wind, and pointed, like so many ghostly fingers, out to dangerous seas, where fragments of great wrecks were drifting, perhaps, and helpless men were rocked

upon them into a sleep as deep as the unfathomable waters. When Florence came into the city, and passed gentlemen who were talking together, she dreaded to hear them speaking of the ship, and saying it was lost. Pictures and prints of vessels fighting with the rolling waves filled her with alarm. The smoke and clouds, though moving gently, moved too fast for her apprehensions, and made her fear there was a tempest blowing at that moment on the ocean.

Susan Nipper may or may not have been affected similarly, but having her attention much engaged in struggles with boys, whenever there was any press of people — for, between that grade of human kind and herself, there was some natural animosity that invariably broke out, whenever they came together — it would seem that she had not much leisure on the road for intellectual operations.

Arriving in good time abreast of the Wooden Midshipman on the opposite side of the way, and waiting for an opportunity to cross the street, they were a little surprised at first to see, at the Instrument-maker's door, a round-headed lad, with his chubby face addressed towards the sky, who, as they looked at him, suddenly thrust into his capacious mouth two fingers of each hand, and with the assistance of that machinery whistled, with astonishing shrillness, to some pigeons at a considerable elevation in the air.

"Mrs. Richards's eldest, miss!" said Susan, "and the worrit of Mrs. Richards's life!"

As Polly had been to tell Florence of the resuscitated prospects of her son and heir, Florence was prepared for the meeting: so, a favorable moment presenting itself, they both hastened across, without any further contem-

plation of Mrs. Richards's bane. That sporting character, unconscious of their approach, again whistled with his utmost might, and then yelled in a rapture of excitement, "Strays! Whoo-oop! Strays!" which identification had such an effect upon the conscience-stricken pigeons, that instead of going direct to some town in the north of England, as appeared to have been their original intention, they began to wheel and falter; whereupon Mrs. Richards's first-born pierced them with another whistle, and again yelled, in a voice that rose above the turmoil of the street, "Strays! Whoo-oop! Strays!"

From this transport, he was abruptly recalled to terrestrial objects, by a poke from Miss Nipper, which sent him into the shop.

"Is this the way you show your penitence, when Mrs. Richards has been fretting for you months and months!" said Susan, following the poke. "Where's Mr. Gills?"

Rob, who smoothed his first rebellious glance at Miss Nipper when he saw Florence following, put his knuckles to his hair, in honor of the latter, and said to the former, that Mr. Gills was out.

"Fetch him home," said Miss Nipper, with authority, "and say that my young lady's here."

"I don't know where he's gone," said Rob.

"Is *that* your penitence?" cried Susan, with stinging sharpness.

"Why how can I go and fetch him when I don't know where to go?" whimpered the baited Rob. "How can you be so unreasonable?"

"Did Mr. Gills say when he should be home?" asked Florence.

"Yes, miss," replied Rob, with another application of his knuckles to his hair. "He said he should be home

early in the afternoon; in about a couple of hours from now, miss."

"Is he very anxious about his nephew?" inquired Susan.

"Yes, miss," returned Rob, preferring to address himself to Florence and slighting Nipper; "I should say he was, very much so. He a'n't in-doors, miss, not a quarter of an hour together. He can't settle in one place five minutes. He goes about, like a—just like a stray," said Rob, stooping to get a glimpse of the pigeons through the window, and checking himself, with his fingers half-way to his mouth, on the verge of another whistle.

"Do you know a friend of Mr. Gills, called Captain Cuttle?" inquired Florence, after a moment's reflection.

"Him with a hook, miss?" rejoined Rob, with an illustrative twist of his left hand. "Yes, miss. He was here the day before yesterday."

"Has he not been here since?" asked Susan.

"No, miss," returned Rob, still addressing his reply to Florence.

"Perhaps Walter's uncle has gone there, Susan," observed Florence, turning to her.

"To Captain Cuttle's, miss?" interposed Rob, "no, he's not gone there, miss. Because he left particular word that if Captain Cuttle called, I should tell him how surprised he was, not to have seen him yesterday, and should make him stop 'till he came back."

"Do you know where Captain Cuttle lives?" asked Florence.

Rob replied in the affirmative, and turning to a greasy parchment book on the shop-desk, read the address aloud.

Florence again turned to her maid and took counsel

with her in a low voice, while Rob the round-eyed, mindful of his patron's secret charge, looked on and listened. Florence proposed that they should go to Captain Cuttle's house; hear from his own lips, what he thought of the absence of any tidings of the Son and Heir; and bring him, if they could, to comfort Uncle Sol. Susan at first objected slightly, on the score of distance; but a hackney-coach being mentioned by her mistress, withdrew that opposition, and gave in her assent. There were some minutes of discussion between them before they came to this conclusion, during which the staring Rob paid close attention to both speakers, and inclined his ear to each by turns, as if he were appointed arbitrator of the arguments.

In fine, Rob was despatched for a coach, the visitors keeping shop meanwhile; and when he brought it, they got into it, leaving word for Uncle Sol that they would be sure to call again, on their way back. Rob having stared after the coach until it was as invisible as the pigeons had now become, sat down behind the desk with a most assiduous demeanor; and in order that he might forget nothing of what had transpired, made notes of it on various small scraps of paper, with a vast expenditure of ink. There was no danger of these documents betraying anything, if accidentally lost; for long before a word was dry, it became as profound a mystery to Rob, as if he had had no part whatever in its production.

While he was yet busy with these labors, the hackney-coach, after encountering unheard-of difficulties from swivel-bridges, soft roads, impassable canals, caravans of casks, settlements of scarlet-beans and little wash-houses, and many such obstacles abounding in that country,

stopped at the corner of Brig Place. Alighting here, Florence and Susan Nipper walked down the street, and sought out the abode of Captain Cuttle.

It happened by evil chance to be one of Mrs. MacStinger's great cleaning days. On these occasions, Mrs. MacStinger was knocked up by the policeman at a quarter before three in the morning, and rarely succumbed before twelve o'clock next night. The chief object of this institution appeared to be, that Mrs. MacStinger should move all the furniture into the back garden at early dawn, walk about the house in pattens all day, and move the furniture back again after dark. These ceremonies greatly fluttered those doves the young MacStingers, who were not only unable at such times to find any resting-place for the soles of their feet, but generally came in for a good deal of pecking from the maternal bird during the progress of the solemnities.

At the moment when Florence and Susan Nipper presented themselves at Mrs. MacStinger's door, that worthy but redoubtable female was in the act of conveying Alexander MacStinger, aged two years and three months, along the passage for forcible deposition in a sitting posture on the street pavement; Alexander being black in the face with holding his breath after punishment, and a cool paving-stone being usually found to act as a powerful restorative in such cases.

The feelings of Mrs. MacStinger, as a woman and a mother, were outraged by the look of pity for Alexander which she observed on Florence's face. Therefore, Mrs. MacStinger asserting those finest emotions of our nature, in preference to weakly gratifying her curiosity, shook and buffeted Alexander both before and during the application of the paving-stone, and took no further notice of the strangers.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Florence, when the child had found his breath again, and was using it. "Is this Captain Cuttle's house?"

"No," said Mrs. MacStinger.

"Not Number Nine?" asked Florence, hesitating.

"Who said it wasn't Number Nine?" said Mrs. MacStinger.

Susan Nipper instantly struck in, and begged to inquire what Mrs. MacStinger meant by that, and if she knew whom she was talking to.

Mrs. MacStinger in retort, looked at her all over. "What do *you* want with Captain Cuttle, I should wish to know?" said Mrs. MacStinger.

"Should you? Then I'm sorry that you won't be satisfied," returned Miss Nipper.

"Hush, Susan! If you please!" said Florence. "Perhaps you can have the goodness to tell us where Captain Cuttle lives, ma'am, as he don't live here."

"Who says he don't live here?" retorted the implacable MacStinger. "I said it wasn't Cap'en Cuttle's house — and it a'n't his house — and forbid it, that it ever should be his house — for Cap'en Cuttle don't know how to keep a house — and don't deserve to have a house — it's *my* house — and when I let the upper floor to Cap'en Cuttle, oh I do a thankless thing, and cast pearls before swine!"

Mrs. MacStinger pitched her voice for the upper windows in offering these remarks, and cracked off each clause sharply by itself as if from a rifle possessing an infinity of barrels. After the last shot, the captain's voice was heard to say, in feeble remonstrance from his own room, "Steady below!"

"Since you want Cap'en Cuttle, there he is!" said

Mrs. MacStinger, with an angry motion of her hand. On Florence making bold to enter, without any more parley, and on Susan following, Mrs. MacStinger recommenced her pedestrian exercise in pattens, and Alexander MacStinger (still on the paving-stone), who had stopped in his crying to attend to the conversation, began to wail again, entertaining himself during that dismal performance, which was quite mechanical, with a general survey of the prospect, terminating in the hackney-coach.

The captain in his own apartment was sitting with his hands in his pockets and his legs drawn up under his chair, on a very small desolate island, lying about mid way in an ocean of soap and water. The captain's windows had been cleaned, the walls had been cleaned, the stove had been cleaned, and everything, the stove excepted, was wet, and shining with soft soap and sand: the smell of which dry-saltery impregnated the air. In the midst of the dreary scene, the captain, cast away upon his island, looked round on the waste of waters with a rueful countenance, and seemed waiting for some friendly bark to come that way, and take him off.

But when the captain, directing his forlorn visage towards the door, saw Florence appear with her maid, no words can describe his astonishment. Mrs. MacStinger's eloquence having rendered all other sounds but imperfectly distinguishable, he had looked for no rarer visitor than the potboy or the milkman; wherefore, when Florence appeared, and coming to the confines of the island, put her hand in his, the captain stood up, aghast, as if he supposed her, for the moment, to be some young member of the Flying Dutchman's family.

Instantly recovering his self-possession, however, the

captain's first care was to place her on dry land, which he happily accomplished, with one motion of his arm. Issuing forth, then, upon the main, Captain Cuttle took Miss Nipper round the waist, and bore her to the island also. Captain Cuttle, then, with great respect and admiration, raised the hand of Florence to his lips, and standing off a little (for the island was not large enough for three), beamed on her from the soap and water like a new description of Triton.

"You are amazed to see us, I am sure," said Florence, with a smile.

The inexpressibly gratified captain kissed his hook in reply, and growled, as if a choice and delicate compliment were included in the words, "Stand by! Stand by!"

"But I couldn't rest," said Florence, "without coming to ask you what you think about dear Walter — who is my brother, now — and whether there is anything to fear, and whether you will not go and console his poor uncle every day, until we have some intelligence of him?"

At these words Captain Cuttle, as by an involuntary gesture, clapped his hand to his head, on which the hard glazed hat was not, and looked discomfited.

"Have you any fears for Walter's safety?" inquired Florence, from whose face the captain (so enraptured he was with it) could not take his eyes: while she, in her turn, looked earnestly at him, to be assured of the sincerity of his reply.

"No, Heart's-delight," said Captain Cuttle, "I am not afeard. Wal'r is a lad as 'll go through a deal o' hard weather. Wal'r is a lad as 'll bring as much success to that 'ere brig as a lad is capable on. Wal'r," said the

captain, his eyes glistening with the praise of his young friend, and his hook raised to announce a beautiful quotation, "is what you may call a out'ard and visible sign of a in'ard and spirited grasp, and when found make a note of."

Florence, who did not quite understand this, though the captain evidently thought it full of meaning, and highly satisfactory, mildly looked to him for something more.

"I am not afeard, my Heart's-delight," resumed the captain. "There's been most uncommon bad weather in them latitudes, there's no denyin', and they have drove and drove and been beat off, maybe t'other side the world. But the ship's a good ship, and the lad's a good lad; and it a'n't easy, thank the Lord," the captain made a little bow, "to break up hearts of oak, whether they're in brigs or buzzums. Here we have 'em both ways, which is bringing it up with a round turn, and so I a'n't a bit afeard as yet."

"As yet?" repeated Florence.

"Not a bit," returned the captain, kissing his iron hand; "and afore I begin to be, my Heart's-delight, Wal'r will have wrote home from the island, or from some port or another, and made all taut and ship-shape. And with regard to old Sol Gills," here the captain became solemn, "who I'll stand by, and not desert until death do us part, and when the stormy winds do blow, do blow, do blow — overhaul the Catechism," said the captain parenthetically, "and there you'll find them expressions — if it would console Sol Gills to have the opinion of a seafaring man as has got a mind equal to any undertaking that he puts it alongside of, and as was all but smashed in his 'prenticeship, and of which the

name is Bunsby, that 'ere man shall give him such an opinion in his own parlor as'll stun him. Ah!" said Captain Cuttle, vauntingly, "as much as if he'd gone and knocked his head again a door!"

"Let us take this gentleman to see him, and let us hear what he says," cried Florence. "Will you go with us now? We have a coach here."

Again the captain clapped his hand to his head, on which the hard glazed hat was not, and looked discomfited. But at this instant a most remarkable phenomenon occurred. The door opening without any note of preparation, and apparently of itself, the hard glazed hat in question skimmed into the room like a bird, and alighted heavily at the captain's feet. The door then shut as violently as it had opened, and nothing ensued in explanation of the prodigy.

Captain Cuttle picked up his hat, and having turned it over with a look of interest and welcome, began to polish it on his sleeve. While doing so, the captain eyed his visitors intently, and said in a low voice:

"You see I should have bore down on Sol Gills yesterday, and this morning, but she — she took it away and kept it. That's the long and short of the subject."

"Who did, for goodness' sake?" asked Susan Nipper.

"The lady of the house, my dear," returned the captain, in a gruff whisper, and making signals of secrecy. "We had some words about the swabbing of these here planks, and she — in short," said the captain, eying the door, and relieving himself with a long breath, "she stopped my liberty."

"Oh! I wish she had me to deal with!" said Susan, reddening with the energy of the wish. "I'd stop her!"

"Would you, do you think, my dear?" rejoined the

captain, shaking his head doubtfully, but regarding the desperate courage of the fair aspirant with obvious admiration. "I don't know. It's difficult navigation. She's very hard to carry on with, my dear. You never can tell how she'll head, you see. She's full one minute, and round upon you next. And when she *is* a tartar," said the captain, with the perspiration breaking out upon his forehead — There was nothing but a whistle emphatic enough for the conclusion of the sentence, so the captain whistled tremulously. After which he again shook his head, and recurring to his admiration of Miss Nipper's devoted bravery, timidly repeated, "Would you, do you think, my dear?"

Susan only replied with a bridling smile, but that was so very full of defiance, that there is no knowing how long Captain Cuttle might have stood entranced in its contemplation, if Florence in her anxiety had not again proposed their immediately resorting to the oracular Bunsby. Thus reminded of his duty, Captain Cuttle put on the glazed hat firmly, took up another knobby stick, with which he had supplied the place of that one given to Walter, and offering his arm to Florence, prepared to cut his way through the enemy.

It turned out, however, that Mrs. MacStinger had already changed her course, and that she headed, as the captain had remarked she often did, in quite a new direction. For when they got down-stairs, they found that exemplary woman beating the mats on the door-steps, with Alexander, still upon the paving-stone, dimly looming through a fog of dust; and so absorbed was Mrs. MacStinger in her household occupation, that when Captain Cuttle and his visitors passed, she beat the harder, and neither by word nor gesture showed any

consciousness of their vicinity. The captain was so well pleased with this easy escape — although the effect of the door-mats on him was like a copious administration of snuff, and made him sneeze until the tears ran down his face — that he could hardly believe his good fortune; but more than once, between the door and the hackney-coach, looked over his shoulder, with an obvious apprehension of Mrs. MacStinger's giving chase yet.

However, they got to the corner of Brig Place without any molestation from that terrible fire-ship; and the captain mounting the coach-box — for his gallantry would not allow him to ride inside with the ladies, though besought to do so — piloted the driver on his course for Captain Bunsby's vessel, which was called the Cautious Clara, and was lying hard by Ratcliffe.

Arrived at the wharf off which this great commander's ship was jammed in among some five hundred companions, whose tangled rigging looked like monstrous cobwebs half swept down, Captain Cuttle appeared at the coach-window, and invited Florence and Miss Nipper to accompany him on board; observing that Bunsby was to the last degree soft-hearted in respect of ladies, and that nothing would so much tend to bring his expansive intellect into a state of harmony as their presentation to the Cautious Clara.

Florence readily consented; and the captain taking her little hand in his prodigious palm, led her, with a mixed expression of patronage, paternity, pride, and ceremony, that was pleasant to see, over several very dirty decks, until, coming to the Clara, they found that cautious craft (which lay outside the tier) with her gangway removed, and half a dozen feet of river interposed between herself and her nearest neighbor. It appeared

from Captain Cuttle's explanation, that the great Bunsby, like himself, was cruelly treated by his landlady, and that when her usage of him for the time being was so hard that he could bear it no longer, he set this gulf between them as a last resource.

"Clara a-hoy!" cried the captain, putting a hand to each side of his mouth.

"A-hoy!" cried a boy, like the captain's echo, tumbling up from below.

"Bunsby aboard?" cried the captain, hailing the boy in a stentorian voice, as if he were half a mile off instead of two yards.

"Ay, ay!" cried the boy, in the same tone.

The boy then shoved out a plank to Captain Cuttle, who adjusted it carefully, and led Florence across: returning presently for Miss Nipper. So they stood upon the deck of the Cautious Clara, in whose standing rigging, divers fluttering articles of dress were curing, in company with a few tongues and some mackerel.

Immediately there appeared, coming slowly up above the bulkhead of the cabin, another bulkhead — human and very large — with one stationary eye in the mahogany face, and one revolving one, on the principal of some light-houses. This head was decorated with shaggy hair, like oakum, which had no governing inclination towards the north, east, west, or south, but inclined to all four quarters of the compass, and to every point upon it. The head was followed by a perfect desert of chin, and by a shirt-collar and neckerchief, and by a dreadnought pilot-coat, and by a pair of dreadnought pilot-trousers, whereof the waistband was so very broad and high, that it became a succedaneum for a waistcoat: being ornamented near the wearer's breast-bone with some massive

wooden buttons, like backgammon men. As the lower portions of these pantaloons became revealed, Bunsby stood confessed; his hands in their pockets, which were of vast size; and his gaze directed, not to Captain Cuttle or the ladies, but the mast-head.

The profound appearance of this philosopher, who was bulky and strong, and on whose extremely red face an expression of taciturnity sat enthroned, not inconsistent with his character, in which that quality was proudly conspicuous, almost daunted Captain Cuttle, though on familiar terms with him. Whispering to Florence that Bunsby had never in his life expressed surprise, and was considered not to know what it meant, the captain watched him as he eyed his mast-head, and afterwards swept the horizon; and when the revolving eye seemed to be coming round in his direction, said:

"Bunsby, my lad, how fares it?"

A deep, gruff, husky utterance, which seemed to have no connection with Bunsby, and certainly had not the least effect upon his face, replied, "Ay, ay, shipmet, how goes it!" At the same time Bunsby's right hand and arm, emerging from a pocket, shook the captain's, and went back again.

"Bunsby," said the captain, striking home at once, "here you are; a man of mind, and a man as can give an opinion. Here's a young lady as wants to take that opinion in regard of my friend Wal'r, likewise my t'other friend, Sol Gills, which is a character for you to come within hail of, being a man of science, which is the mother of inwention, and knows no law. Bunsby will you wear, to oblige me, and come along with us?"

The great commander, who seemed by the expression

of his visage to be always on the look-out for something in the extremest distance, and to have no ocular knowledge of anything within ten miles, made no reply whatever.

"Here is a man," said the captain, addressing himself to his fair auditors, and indicating the commander with his outstretched hook, "that has fell down more than any man alive; that has had more accidents happen to his own self than the Seaman's Hospital to all hands; that took as many spars and bars and bolts about the outside of his head when he was young, as you'd want a order for on Chatham-yard to build a pleasure-yacht with; and yet that got his opinions in that way, it's my belief, for there a'n't nothing like 'em afloat or ashore."

The stolid commander appeared, by a very slight vibration in his elbows, to express some satisfaction in this encomium; but if his face had been as distant as his gaze was, it could hardly have enlightened the beholders less in reference to anything that was passing in his thoughts.

"Shipmet," said Bunsby, all of a sudden, and stooping down to look out under some interposing spar, "what'll the ladies drink?"

Captain Cuttle, whose delicacy was shocked by such an inquiry in connection with Florence, drew the sage aside, and seeming to explain in his ear, accompanied him below; where, that he might not take offence, the captain drank a dram himself, which Florence and Susan, glancing down the open skylight, saw the sage, with difficulty finding room for himself between his berth and a very little brass fireplace, serve out for self and friend. They soon reappeared on deck, and Captain Cuttle, triumphing in the success of his enterprise, conducted

Florence back to the coach, while Bunsby followed, escorting Miss Nipper, whom he hugged upon the way (much to that young lady's indignation) with his pilot-coated arm, like a blue bear.

The captain put his oracle inside, and gloried so much in having secured him, and having got that mind into a hackney-coach, that he could not refrain from often peeping in at Florence through the little window behind the driver, and testifying his delight in smiles, and also in taps upon his forehead, to hint to her that the brain of Bunsby was hard at it. In the mean time, Bunsby, still hugging Miss Nipper (for his friend, the captain, had not exaggerated the softness of his heart), uniformly preserved his gravity of deportment, and showed no other consciousness of her or anything.

Uncle Sol, who had come home, received them at the door, and ushered them immediately into the little back-parlor: strangely altered by the absence of Walter. On the table, and about the room, were the charts and maps on which the heavy-hearted instrument-maker had again and again tracked the missing vessel across the sea, and on which, with a pair of compasses that he still had in his hand, he had been measuring, a minute before, how far she must have driven, to have driven here or there: and trying to demonstrate that a long time must elapse before hope was exhausted.

"Whether she can have run," said Uncle Sol, looking wistfully over the chart; "but no, that's almost impossible. Or whether she can have been forced by stress of weather, — but that's not reasonably likely. Or whether there is any hope she so far changed her course as — but even I can hardly hope that!" With such broken suggestions, poor old Uncle Sol roamed over the

great sheet before him, and could not find a speck of hopeful probability in it large enough to set one small point of the compasses upon.

Florence saw immediately — it would have been difficult to help seeing — that there was a singular indescribable change in the old man, and that while his manner was far more restless and unsettled than usual, there was yet a curious, contradictory decision in it, that perplexed her very much. She fancied once that he spoke wildly, and at random; for on her saying she regretted not to have seen him when she had been there before that morning, he at first replied that he had been to see her, and directly afterwards seemed to wish to recall that answer.

"You have been to see me?" said Florence. "To-day?"

"Yes, my dear young lady," returned Uncle Sol, looking at her and away from her in a confused manner. "I wished to see you with my own eyes, and to hear you with my own ears, once more before" — There he stopped.

"Before when? Before what?" said Florence, putting her hand upon his arm.

"Did I say 'before'?" replied old Sol. "If I did, I must have meant before we should have news of my dear boy."

"You are not well," said Florence, tenderly. "You have been so very anxious. I am sure you are not well."

"I am as well," returned the old man, shutting up his right hand, and holding it out to show her: "as well and firm as any man at my time of life can hope to be. See! It's steady. Is its master not as capable of reso-

lution and fortitude as many a younger man? I think so. We shall see."

There was that in his manner more than in his words, though they remained with her too, which impressed Florence so much, that she would have confided her uneasiness to Captain Cuttle at that moment, if the captain had not seized that moment for expounding the state of circumstances on which the opinion of the sagacious Bunsby was requested, and entreating that profound authority to deliver the same.

Bunsby, whose eye continued to be addressed to somewhere about the half-way house between London and Gravesend, two or three times put out his rough right arm, as seeking to wind it for inspiration, round the fair form of Miss Nipper; but that young female having withdrawn herself, in displeasure, to the opposite side of the table, the soft heart of the commander of the Cautious Clara met with no response to its impulses. After sundry failures in this wise, the commander, addressing himself to nobody, thus spake; or rather the voice within him said of its own accord, and quite independent of himself, as if he were possessed by a gruff spirit:

"My name's Jack Bunsby!"

"He was christened John," cried the delighted Captain Cuttle. "Hear him!"

"And what I says," pursued the voice, after some deliberation, "I stands to."

The captain, with Florence on his arm, nodded at the auditory, and seemed to say, "Now he's coming out. This is what I meant when I brought him."

"Whereby," proceeded the voice, "why not? If so, what odds? Can any man say otherwise? No. Awast then!"

When it had pursued its train of argument to this point, the voice stopped and rested. It then proceeded very slowly, thus :

" Do I believe that this here Son and Heir's gone down, my lads? Mayhap. Do I say so? Which? If a skipper stands out by Sen' George's Channel, making for the Downs, what's right ahead of him? The Goodwins. He isn't forced to run upon the Goodwins, but he may. The bearings of this observation lays in the application on it. That a'n't no part of my duty. Awast then, keep a bright look-out for'ard, and good luck to you ! "

The voice here went out of the back-parlor and into the street, taking the commander of the Cautious Clara with it, and accompanying him on board again with all convenient expedition, where he immediately turned in, and refreshed his mind with a nap.

The students of the sage's precepts, left to their own application of his wisdom — upon a principle which was the main leg of the Bunsby tripod, as it is perchance of some other oracular stools — looked at one another in a little uncertainty ; while Rob the Grinder, who had taken the innocent freedom of peering in, and listening, through the skylight in the roof, came softly down from the leads, in a state of very dense confusion. Captain Cuttle, however, whose admiration of Bunsby was, if possible, enhanced by the splendid manner in which he had justified his reputation and come through this solemn reference, proceeded to explain that Bunsby meant nothing but confidence ; that Bunsby had no misgivings ; and that such an opinion as that man had given, coming from such a mind as his, was Hope's own anchor, and with good roads to cast it in. Florence en-

deavored to believe that the captain was right; but the Nipper, with her arms tight folded, shook her head in resolute denial, and had no more trust in Bunsby than in Mr. Perch himself.

The philosopher seemed to have left Uncle Sol pretty much where he had found him, for he still went roaming about the watery world, compasses in hand, and discovering no rest for them. It was in pursuance of a whisper in his ear from Florence, while the old man was absorbed in this pursuit, that Captain Cuttle laid his heavy hand upon his shoulder.

"What cheer, Sol Gills?" cried the captain, heartily.

"But so-so, Ned," returned the Instrument-maker. "I have been remembering, all this afternoon, that on the very day when my boy entered Dombey's house, and came home late to dinner, sitting just there where you stand, we talked of storm and shipwreck, and I could hardly turn him from the subject."

But meeting the eyes of Florence, which were fixed with earnest scrutiny upon his face, the old man stopped and smiled.

"Stand by, old friend!" cried the captain. "Look alive! I tell you what, Sol Gills; arter I've convoyed Heart's-delight safe home," here the captain kissed his hook to Florence, "I'll come back and take you in tow for the rest of this blessed day. You'll come and eat your dinner along with me, Sol, somewheres or other."

"Not to-day, Ned!" said the old man quickly, and appearing to be unaccountably startled by the proposition. "Not to-day. I couldn't do it!"

"Why not?" returned the captain, gazing at him in astonishment.

"I — I have so much to do. I — I mean to think of,

and arrange. I couldn't do it, Ned, indeed. I must go out again, and be alone, and turn my mind to many things to-day."

The captain looked at the Instrument-maker, and looked at Florence, and again at the Instrument-maker. "To-morrow, then," he suggested at last.

"Yes, yes. To-morrow," said the old man. "Think of me to-morrow. Say to-morrow."

"I shall come here early, mind, Sol Gills," stipulated the captain.

"Yes, yes. The first thing to-morrow morning," said old Sol; "and now good-by, Ned Cuttle, and God bless you!"

Squeezing both the captain's hands, with uncommon fervor, as he said it, the old man turned to Florence, folded hers in his own, and put them to his lips; then hurried her out to the coach with very singular precipitation. Altogether, he made such an effect on Captain Cuttle that the captain lingered behind, and instructed Rob to be particularly gentle and attentive to his master until the morning: which injunction he strengthened with the payment of one shilling down, and the promise of another sixpence before noon next day. This kind office performed, Captain Cuttle, who considered himself the natural and lawful body-guard of Florence, mounted the box with a mighty sense of his trust, and escorted her home. At parting, he assured her that he would stand by Sol Gills, close and true; and once again inquired of Susan Nipper, unable to forget her gallant words in reference to Mrs. MacStinger, "Would you, do you think, my dear, though!"

When the desolate house had closed upon the two, the captain's thoughts reverted to the old Instrument-maker,

and he felt uncomfortable. Therefore, instead of going home, he walked up and down the street several times, and, eking out his leisure until evening, dined late at a certain angular little tavern in the city, with a public parlor like a wedge, to which glazed hats much resorted. The captain's principal intention was to pass Sol Gills's after dark, and look in through the window: which he did. The parlor-door stood open, and he could see his old friend writing busily and steadily at the table within, while the little Midshipman, already sheltered from the night dews, watched him from the counter; under which Rob the Grinder made his own bed, preparatory to shutting the shop. Reassured by the tranquillity that reigned within the precincts of the wooden mariner, the captain headed for Brig-place, resolving to weigh anchor betimes in the morning.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE STUDY OF A LOVING HEART.

Sir Barnet and Lady Skettles, very good people, resided in a pretty villa at Fulham, on the banks of the Thames; which was one of the most desirable residences in the world when a rowing-match happened to be going past, but had its little inconveniences at other times, among which may be enumerated the occasional appearance of the river in the drawing-room, and the contemporaneous disappearance of the lawn and shrubbery.

Sir Barnet Skettles expressed his personal consequence chiefly through an antique gold snuff-box, and a ponderous silk pocket-handkerchief, which he had an imposing manner of drawing out of his pocket like a banner, and using with both hands at once. Sir Barnet's object in life was constantly to extend the range of his acquaintance. Like a heavy body dropped into water — not to disparage so worthy a gentleman by the comparison — it was in the nature of things that Sir Barnet must spread an ever-widening circle about him, until there was no room left. Or, like a sound in air, the vibration of which, according to the speculation of an ingenious modern philosopher, may go on travelling forever through the interminable fields of space, nothing but coming to the end of his moral tether could stop Sir Barnet Skettles in his voyage of discovery through the social system.

Sir Barnet was proud of making people acquainted with people. He liked the thing for its own sake, and it advanced his favorite object too. For example, if Sir Barnet had the good fortune to get hold of a raw recruit, or a country gentleman, and ensnared him to his hospitable villa, Sir Barnet would say to him, on the morning after his arrival, "Now, my dear sir, is there anybody you would like to know? Who is there you would wish to meet? Do you take any interest in writing people, or in painting or sculpturing people, or in acting people, or in anything of that sort?" Possibly the patient answered yes, and mentioned somebody, of whom Sir Barnet had no more personal knowledge than of Ptolemy the Great. Sir Barnet replied, that nothing on earth was easier, as he knew him very well: immediately called on the aforesaid somebody, left his card, wrote a short note, — "My dear Sir — penalty of your eminent position — friend of my house naturally desirous — Lady Skettles and myself participate — trust that genius being superior to ceremonies, you will do us the distinguished favor of giving us the pleasure," &c. &c. — and so killed a brace of birds with one stone, dead as door-nails.

With the snuff-box and banner in full force, Sir Barnet Skettles propounded his usual inquiry to Florence on the first morning of her visit. When Florence thanked him, and said there was no one in particular whom she desired to see, it was natural she should think with a pang of poor lost Walter. When Sir Barnet Skettles, urging his kind offer, said, "My dear Miss Dombey, are you sure you can remember no one whom your good papa — to whom I beg you to present the best compliments of myself and Lady Skettles when you write — might wish you to know?" it was natural,

perhaps, that the poor head should droop a little, and that her voice should tremble as it softly answered in the negative.

Skettles junior, much stiffened as to his cravat, and sobered down as to his spirits, was at home for the holidays, and appeared to feel himself aggrieved by the solicitude of his excellent mother that he should be attentive to Florence. Another and a deeper injury under which the soul of young Barnet chafed, was the company of Dr. and Mrs. Blimber, who had been invited on a visit to the parental roof tree, and of whom the young gentleman often said he would have preferred their passing the vacation at Jericho.

"Is there anybody *you* can suggest, now, Doctor Blimber?" said Sir Barnet Skettles, turning to that gentleman.

"You are very kind, Sir Barnet," returned Doctor Blimber. "Really I am not aware that there is, in particular. I like to know my fellow-men in general, Sir Barnet. What does Terence say? Any one who is the parent of a son is interesting to *me*."

"Has Mrs. Blimber any wish to see any remarkable person?" asked Sir Barnet courteously.

Mrs. Blimber replied, with a sweet smile and a shake of her sky-blue cap, that if Sir Barnet could have made her known to Cicero, she would have troubled him: but such an introduction not being feasible, and she already enjoying the friendship of himself and his amiable lady, and possessing with the Doctor her husband their joint confidence in regard to their dear son — here young Barnet was observed to curl his nose — she asked no more.

Sir Barnet was fain, under these circumstances, to

content himself for the time with the company assembled. Florence was glad of that; for she had a study to pursue among them, and it lay too near her heart, and was too precious and momentous, to yield to any other interest.

There were some children staying in the house. Children who were as frank and happy with fathers and with mothers, as those rosy faces opposite home. Children who had no restraint upon their love, and freely showed it. Florence sought to learn their secret; sought to find out what it was she had missed; what simple art they knew, and she knew not; how she could be taught by them to show her father that she loved him, and to win his love again.

Many a day did Florence thoughtfully observe these children. On many a bright morning did she leave her bed when the glorious sun rose, and walking up and down upon the river's bank, before any one in the house was stirring, look up at the windows of their rooms, and think of them, asleep, so gently tended and affectionately thought of. Florence would feel more lonely then, than in the great house all alone; and would think sometimes that she was better there than here, and that there was greater peace in hiding herself than in mingling with others of her age, and finding how unlike them all she was. But attentive to her study, though it touched her to the quick at every little leaf she turned in the hard book, Florence remained among them, and tried, with patient hope, to gain the knowledge that she wearied for.

Ah! how to gain it! how to know the charm in its beginning! There were daughters here, who rose up in the morning, and lay down to rest at night, possessed of fathers' hearts already. They had no repulse to

overcome, no coldness to dread, no frown to smooth away. As the morning advanced, and the windows opened one by one, and the dew began to dry upon the flowers and grass, and youthful feet began to move upon the lawn, Florence glancing round at the bright faces, thought what was there she could learn from these children? It was too late to learn from them; each could approach her father fearlessly, and put up her lips to meet the ready kiss, and wind her arm about the neck that bent down to caress her. *She* could not begin by being so bold. Oh! could it be that there was less and less hope as she studied more and more!

She remembered well, that even the old woman who had robbed her when a little child — whose image and whose house and all she had said and done, were stamped upon her recollection, with the enduring sharpness of a fearful impression made at that early period of life — had spoken fondly of her daughter, and how terribly even she had cried out in the pain of hopeless separation from her child. But her own mother, she would think again, when she recalled this, had loved her well. Then, sometimes, when her thoughts reverted swiftly to the void between herself and her father, Florence would tremble, and the tears would start upon her face, as she pictured to herself her mother living on, and coming also to dislike her, because of her wanting the unknown grace that should conciliate that father naturally, and had never done so from her cradle. She knew that this imagination did wrong to her mother's memory, and had no truth in it, or base to rest upon; and yet she tried so hard to justify him, and to find the whole blame in herself, that she could not resist its passing, like a wild cloud, through the distance of her mind.

There came among the other visitors, soon after Florence, one beautiful girl, three or four years younger than she, who was an orphan child, and who was accompanied by her aunt, a gray-haired lady, who spoke much to Florence, and who greatly liked (but that they all did) to hear her sing of an evening, and would always sit near her at that time, with motherly interest. They had only been two days in the house, when Florence, being in an arbor in the garden one warm morning, musingly observant of a youthful group upon the turf, through some intervening boughs, and wreathing flowers for the head of one little creature among them who was the pet and plaything of the rest, heard this same lady and her niece, in pacing up and down a sheltered nook close by, speak of herself.

"Is Florence an orphan like me, aunt?" said the child.

"No, my love. She has no mother, but her father is living."

"Is she in mourning for her poor mama now?" inquired the child, quickly.

"No; for her only brother."

"Has she no other brother?"

"None."

"No sister?"

"None."

"I am very, very sorry!" said the little girl.

As they stopped soon afterwards to watch some boats, and had been silent in the mean time, Florence, who had risen when she heard her name, and had gathered up her flowers to go and meet them, that they might know of her being within hearing, resumed her seat and work, expecting to hear no more; but the conversation recommenced next moment.

"Florence is a favorite with every one here, and deserves to be, I am sure," said the child, earnestly. "Where is her papa?"

The aunt replied, after a moment's pause, that she did not know. Her tone of voice arrested Florence, who had started from her seat again; and held her fastened to the spot, with her work hastily caught up to her bosom, and her two hands saving it from being scattered on the ground.

"He is in England, I hope, aunt?" said the child.

"I believe so. Yes; I know he is, indeed."

"Has he ever been here?"

"I believe not. No."

"Is he coming here to see her?"

"I believe not."

"Is he lame, or blind, or ill, aunt?" asked the child.

The flowers that Florence held to her breast began to fall when she heard those words, so wonderingly spoken. She held them closer; and her face hung down upon them.

"Kate," said the lady, after another moment of silence, "I will tell you the whole truth about Florence as I have heard it, and believe it to be. Tell no one else, my dear, because it may be little known here, and your doing so would give her pain."

"I never will!" exclaimed the child.

"I know you never will," returned the lady. "I can trust you as myself. I fear then, Kate, that Florence's father cares little for her, very seldom sees her, never was kind to her in her life, and now quite shuns her and avoids her. She would love him dearly if he would suffer her, but he will not—though for no fault of hers; and she is greatly to be loved and pitied by all gentle hearts."

More of the flowers that Florence held, fell scattering on the ground; those that remained were wet, but not with dew; and her face dropped upon her laden hands.

"Poor Florence! Dear, good Florence!" cried the child.

"Do you know why I have told you this, Kate?" said the lady.

"That I may be very kind to her, and take great care to try to please her. Is that the reason, aunt?"

"Partly," said the lady, "but not all. Though we see her so cheerful; with a pleasant smile for every one; ready to oblige us all, and bearing her part in every amusement here: she can hardly be quite happy, do you think she can, Kate?"

"I am afraid not," said the little girl.

"And you can understand," pursued the lady, "why her observation of children who have parents who are fond of them, and proud of them — like many here, just now — should make her sorrowful in secret?"

"Yes, dear aunt," said the child, "I understand that very well. Poor Florence!"

More flowers strayed upon the ground, and those she yet held to her breast trembled as if a wintry wind were rustling them.

"My Kate," said the lady, whose voice was serious, but very calm and sweet, and had so impressed Florence from the first moment of her hearing it, "Of all the youthful people here, you are her natural and harmless friend; you have not the innocent means, that happier children have" —

"There are none happier, aunt!" exclaimed the child, who seemed to cling about her.

— "As other children have, dear Kate, of reminding

her of her misfortune. Therefore I would have you, when you try to be her little friend, try all the more for that, and feel that the bereavement you sustained — thank Heaven! before you knew its weight — gives you claim and hold upon poor Florence."

"But I am not without a parent's love, aunt, and I never have been," said the child, "with you."

"However, that may be, my dear," returned the lady, "your misfortune is a lighter one than Florence's; for not an orphan in the wide world can be so deserted as the child who is an outcast from a living parent's love."

The flowers were scattered on the ground like dust; the empty hands were spread upon the face; and orphaned Florence, shrinking down upon the ground, wept long and bitterly.

But true of heart and resolute in her good purpose, Florence held to it as her dying mother held by her upon the day that gave Paul life. He did not know how much she loved him. However long the time in coming, and however slow the interval, she must try to bring that knowledge to her father's heart one day or other. Meantime she must be careful in no thoughtless word, or look, or burst of feeling awakened by any chance circumstance, to complain against him, or to give occasion for these whispers to his prejudice.

Even in the response she made the orphan child, to whom she was attracted strongly, and whom she had such occasion to remember, Florence was mindful of him. If she singled her out too plainly (Florence thought) from among the rest, she would confirm — in one mind certainly; perhaps in more — the belief that he was cruel and unnatural. Her own delight was no set-off to this. What she had overheard was a reason,

not for soothing herself, but for saving him; and Florence did it, in pursuance of the study of her heart.

She did so always. If a book were read aloud, and there were anything in the story that pointed at an unkind father, she was in pain for their application of it to him; not for herself. So with any trifle of an interlude that was acted, or picture that was shown, or game that was played, among them. The occasions for such tenderness towards him were so many, that her mind misgave her often, it would indeed be better to go back to the old house, and live again within the shadow of its dull walls, undisturbed. How few who saw sweet Florence, in her spring of womanhood, the modest little queen of those small revels, imagined what a load of sacred care lay heavy in her breast! How few of those who stiffened in her father's freezing atmosphere, suspected what a heap of fiery coals was piled upon his head!

Florence pursued her study patiently, and, failing to acquire the secret of the nameless grace she sought, among the youthful company who were assembled in the house, often walked out alone, in the early morning, among the children of the poor. But still she found them all too far advanced to learn from. They had won their household places long ago, and did not stand without, as she did, with a bar across the door.

There was one man whom she several times observed at work very early, and often with a girl of about her own age seated near him. He was a very poor man, who seemed to have no regular employment, but now went roaming about the banks of the river when the tide was low, looking out for bits and scraps in the mud; and now worked at the unpromising little patch of garden-ground before his cottage; and now tinkered up a

miserable old boat that belonged to him; or did some job of that kind for a neighbor, as chance occurred. Whatever the man's labor, the girl was never employed; but sat, when she was with him, in a listless, moping state, and idle.

Florence had often wished to speak to this man; yet she had never taken courage to do so, as he made no movement towards her. But one morning when she happened to come upon him suddenly, from a by-path among some pollard willows which terminated in the little shelving piece of stony ground that lay between his dwelling and the water, where he was bending over a fire he had made to calk the old boat which was lying bottom upwards, close by, he raised his head at the sound of her footstep, and gave her Good-morning.

"Good-morning," said Florence, approaching nearer, "you are at work early."

"I'd be glad to be often at work, earlier, miss, if I had work to do."

"Is it so hard to get?" asked Florence.

"*I* find it so," replied the man.

Florence glanced to where the girl was sitting, drawn together, with her elbows on her knees, and her chin on her hands, and said:

"Is that your daughter?"

He raised his head quickly, and looking towards the girl with a brightened face, nodded to her and said "Yes." Florence looked towards her too, and gave her a kind salutation; the girl muttered something in return, ungraciously and sullenly.

"Is she in want of employment also?" said Florence.

The man shook his head. "No, miss," he said. "I work for both."

"Are there only you two, then?" inquired Florence.

"Only us two," said the man. "Her mother has been dead these ten year. Martha!" (He lifted up his head again, and whistled to her.) "Won't you say a word to the pretty young lady?"

The girl made an impatient gesture with her cowering shoulders, and turned her head another way. Ugly, misshapen, peevish, ill-conditioned, ragged, dirty — but beloved! Oh, yes, Florence had seen her father's look towards her, and she knew whose look it had no likeness to.

"I'm afraid she's worse this morning, my poor girl!" said the man, suspending his work, and contemplating his ill-favored child, with a compassion that was the more tender for being rough.

"She is ill, then!" said Florence.

The man drew a deep sigh. "I don't believe my Martha's had five short days' good health," he answered, looking at her still, "in as many long years."

"Ay! and more than that, John," said a neighbor, who had come down to help him with the boat.

"More than that, you say, do you?" cried the other, pushing back his battered hat, and drawing his hand across his forehead. "Very like. It seems a long, long time."

"And the more the time," pursued the neighbor, "the more you've favored and humored her, John, 'till she's got to be a burden to herself, and everybody else."

"Not to me," said her father, falling to his work again. "Not to me."

Florence could feel — who better? — how truly he spoke. She drew a little closer to him, and would have been glad to touch his rugged hand, and thank him for

his goodness to the miserable object that he looked upon with eyes so different from any other man's.

"Who would favor my poor girl — to call it favoring — if *I* didn't?" said the father.

"Ay, ay," cried the neighbor. "In reason, John. But you! You rob yourself to give to her. You bind yourself hand and foot on her account. You make your life miserable along of her. And what does *she* care! You don't believe she knows it?"

The father lifted up his head again, and whistled to her. Martha made the same impatient gesture with her crouching shoulders, in reply; and he was glad and happy.

"Only for that, miss," said the neighbor with a smile, in which there was more of secret sympathy than he expressed; "only to get that, he never lets her out of his sight!"

"Because the day'll come, and has been coming a long while," observed the other, bending low over his work, "when to get half as much from that unfort'nate child of mine — to get the trembling of a finger, or the waving of a hair — would be to raise the dead."

Florence softly put some money near his hand on the old boat, and left him.

And now Florence began to think, if she were to fall ill, if she were to fade like her dear brother, would he then know that she had loved him; would she then grow dear to him; would he come to her bedside, when she was weak and dim of sight, and take her into his embrace, and cancel all the past? Would he so forgive her, in that changed condition, for not having been able to lay open her childish heart to him, as to make it easy to relate with what emotions she had gone out of his

room that night; what she had meant to say if she had had the courage; and how she had endeavored, afterwards, to learn the way she never knew in infancy?

Yes, she thought if she were dying, he would relent. She thought, that if she lay, serene and not unwilling to depart, upon the bed that was curtained round with recollections of their darling boy, he would be touched home, and would say, "Dear Florence, live for me, and we will love each other as we might have done, and be as happy as we might have been these many years!" She thought that if she heard such words from him, and had her arms clasped round him, she could answer with a smile, "It is too late for anything but this; I never could be happier, dear father!" and so leave him, with a blessing on her lips.

The golden water she remembered on the wall, appeared to Florence, in the light of such reflections, only as a current flowing on to rest, and to a region where the dear ones, gone before, were waiting, hand in hand; and often when she looked upon the darker river rippling at her feet, she thought with awful wonder, but not terror, of that river which her brother had so often said was bearing him away.

The father and his sick daughter were yet fresh in Florence's mind, and, indeed, that incident was not a week old, when Sir Barnet and his lady going out walking in the lanes one afternoon, proposed to her to bear them company. Florence readily consenting, Lady Skettles ordered out young Barnet as a matter of course. For nothing delighted Lady Skettles so much, as beholding her eldest son with Florence on his arm.

Barnet, to say the truth, appeared to entertain an opposite sentiment on the subject, and on such occasions

frequently expressed himself audibly, though indefinitely, in reference to "a parcel of girls." As it was not easy to ruffle her sweet temper, however, Florence generally reconciled the young gentleman to his fate after a few minutes, and they strolled on amicably: Lady Skettles and Sir Barnet following, in a state of perfect complacency and high gratification.

This was the order of procedure on the afternoon in question: and Florence had almost succeeded in overruling the present objections of Skettles junior to his destiny, when a gentleman on horseback came riding by, looked at them earnestly as he passed, drew in his rein, wheeled round, and came riding back again, hat in hand.

The gentleman had looked particularly at Florence; and when the little party stopped, on his riding back, he bowed to her before saluting Sir Barnet and his lady. Florence had no remembrance of having ever seen him, but she started involuntarily when he came near her, and drew back.

"My horse is perfectly quiet, I assure you," said the gentleman.

It was not that, but something in the gentleman himself — Florence could not have said what — that made her recoil as if she had been stung.

"I have the honor to address Miss Dombey, I believe?" said the gentleman, with a most persuasive smile. On Florence inclining her head, he added, "My name is Carker. I can hardly hope to be remembered by Miss Dombey, except by name. Carker."

Florence, sensible of a strange inclination to shiver, though the day was hot, presented him to her host and hostess; by whom he was very graciously received.

"I beg pardon," said Mr. Carker, "a thousand times! But I am going down to-morrow morning to Mr. Dombey, at Leamington, and if Miss Dombey can intrust me with any commission, need I say how *very* happy I shall be?"

Sir Barnet immediately divining that Florence would desire to write a letter to her father, proposed to return, and besought Mr. Carker to come home and dine in his riding gear. Mr. Carker had the misfortune to be engaged for dinner, but if Miss Dombey wished to write, nothing would delight him more than to accompany them back, and to be her faithful slave in waiting as long as she pleased. As he said this with his widest smile, and bent down close to her to pat his horse's neck, Florence, meeting his eyes, saw, rather than heard him say, "There is no news of the ship!"

Confused, frightened, shrinking from him, and not even sure that he had said those words, for he seemed to have shown them to her in some extraordinary manner through his smile, instead of uttering them, Florence faintly said that she was obliged to him, but she would not write; she had nothing to say.

"Nothing to send, Miss Dombey?" said the man of teeth.

"Nothing," said Florence, "but my — but my dear love — if you please."

Disturbed as Florence was, she raised her eyes to his face with an imploring and expressive look, that plainly besought him, if he knew — which he as plainly did — that any message between her and her father was an uncommon charge, but that one most of all, to spare her. Mr. Carker smiled and bowed low, and being charged by Sir Barnet, with the best compliments of himself and

Lady Skettles, took his leave, and rode away: leaving a favorable impression on that worthy couple. Florence was seized with such a shudder as he went, that Sir Barnet, adopting the popular superstition, supposed somebody was passing over her grave. Mr. Carker, turning a corner, on the instant, looked back, and bowed, and disappeared, as if he rode off to the church-yard, straight, to do it.

CHAPTER XXV.

STRANGE NEWS OF UNCLE SOL.

Captain Cuttle, though no sluggard, did not turn so early on the morning after he had seen Sol Gills, through the shop-window, writing in the parlor, with the Midshipman upon the counter, and Rob the Grinder making up his bed below it, but that the clocks struck six as he raised himself on his elbow, and took a survey of his little chamber. The captain's eyes must have done severe duty, if he usually opened them as wide on awaking as he did that morning; and were but roughly rewarded for their vigilance, if he generally rubbed them half as hard. But the occasion was no common one, for Rob the Grinder had certainly never stood in the doorway of Captain Cuttle's bedroom before, and in it he stood then, panting at the captain, with a flushed and touzled air of bed about him, that greatly heightened both his color and expression.

"Holloa!" roared the captain. "What's the matter?"

Before Rob could stammer a word in answer, Captain Cuttle turned out, all in a heap, and covered the boy's mouth with his hand.

"Steady my lad," said the captain, "don't ye speak a word to me as yet!"

The captain, looking at his visitor in great consterna-

tion, gently shouldered him into the next room, after laying this injunction upon him; and disappearing for a few moments, forthwith returned in the blue suit. Holding up his hand in token of the injunction not yet being taken off, Captain Cuttle walked up to the cupboard, and poured himself out a dram; a counterpart of which he handed to the messenger. The captain then stood himself up in a corner, against the wall, as if to forestall the possibility of being knocked backward by the communication that was to be made to him; and having swallowed his liquor, with his eyes fixed on the messenger, and his face as pale as his face could be, requested him to "heave-a-head."

"Do you mean, tell you, captain?" asked Rob, who had been greatly impressed by these precautions.

"Ay!" said the captain.

"Well, sir," said Rob, "I a'n't got much to tell. But look here!"

Rob produced a bundle of keys. The captain surveyed them, remained in his corner, and surveyed the messenger.

"And look here!" pursued Rob.

The boy produced a sealed packet, which Captain Cuttle stared at as he had stared at the keys.

"When I woke this morning, captain," said Rob, "which was about a quarter after five, I found these on my pillow. The shop-door was unbolted and unlocked, and Mr. Gills gone."

"Gone!" roared the captain.

"Flowed, sir," returned Rob.

The captain's voice was so tremendous, and he came out of his corner with such way on him, that Rob retreated before him into another corner: holding out the

keys and packet, to prevent himself from being run down.

"'For Captain Cuttle,' sir," cried Rob, "is on the keys, and on the packet too. Upon my word and honor, Captain Cuttle, I don't know anything more about it. I wish I may die if I do! Here's a sitiwation for a lad that's just got a sitiwation," cried the unfortunate Grinder, screwing his cuff into his face: "his master bolted with his place, and him blamed for it!"

These lamentations had reference to Captain Cuttle's gaze, or rather glare, which was full of vague suspicions, threatenings, and denunciations. Taking the proffered packet from his hand, the captain opened it and read as follows: —

"'My dear Ned Cuttle. Enclosed is my will!'" The captain turned it over, with a doubtful look — "'and testament.' — Where's the testament?" said the captain, instantly impeaching the ill-fated Grinder. "What have you done with that, my lad?"

"*I* never see it," whimpered Rob. "Don't keep on suspecting an innocent lad, captain. *I* never touched the testament."

Captain Cuttle shook his head, implying that somebody must be made answerable for it; and gravely proceeded: —

"'Which don't break open for a year, or until you have decisive intelligence of my dear Walter, who is dear to you, Ned, too, I am sure.'" The captain paused and shook his head in some emotion; then, as a reëstablishment of his dignity in this trying position, looked with exceeding sternness at the Grinder. "'If you should never hear of me, or see me more, Ned, remember an old friend as he will remember you to the

last — kindly; and at least until the period I have mentioned has expired, keep a home in the old place for Walter. There are no debts, the loan from Dombey's house is paid off, and all my keys I send with this. Keep this quiet, and make no inquiry for me; it is useless. So no more, dear Ned, from your true friend, Solomon Gills.'" The captain took a long breath, and then read these words, written below: "'The boy Rob, well recommended, as I told you, from Dombey's house. If all else should come to the hammer, take care, Ned, of the little Midshipman.'"

To convey to posterity any idea of the manner in which the captain, after turning this letter over and over, and reading it a score of times, sat down in his chair, and held a court-martial on the subject in his own mind, would require the united genius of all the great men, who, discarding their own untoward days, have determined to go down to posterity, and have never got there. At first the captain was too much confounded and distressed to think of anything but the letter itself; and even when his thoughts began to glance upon the various attendant facts, they might, perhaps, as well have occupied themselves with their former theme, for any light they reflected on them. In this state of mind, Captain Cuttle having the Grinder before the court, and no one else, found it a great relief to decide, generally, that he was an object of suspicion: which the captain so clearly expressed in his visage, that Rob remonstrated.

"Oh, don't, captain!" cried the Grinder. "I wonder how you can! what have I done to be looked at, like that?"

"My lad," said Captain Cuttle, "don't you sing out

afore you're hurt. And don't you commit yourself, whatever you do."

"I haven't been and committed nothing, captain," answered Rob.

"Keep her free, then," said the captain, impressively, "and ride easy."

With a deep sense of the responsibility imposed upon him, and the necessity of thoroughly fathoming this mysterious affair, as became a man in his relations with the parties, Captain Cuttle resolved to go down and examine the premises, and to keep the Grinder with him. Considering that youth as under arrest at present, the captain was in some doubt whether it might not be expedient to handcuff him, or tie his ankles together, or attach a weight to his legs, but not being clear as to the legality of such formalities, the captain decided merely to hold him by the shoulder all the way, and knock him down if he made any objection.

However, he made none, and consequently got to the Instrument-maker's house without being placed under any more stringent restraint. As the shutters were not yet taken down, the captain's first care was to have the shop opened; and when the daylight was freely admitted, he proceeded, with its aid, to further investigation.

The captain's first care was to establish himself in a chair in the shop, as president of the solemn tribunal that was sitting within him; and to require Rob to lie down in his bed under the counter, show exactly where he discovered the keys and packet when he awoke, how he found the door when he went to try it, how he started off to Brig-place — cautiously preventing the latter imitation from being carried farther than the threshold —

and so on to the end of the chapter. When all this had been done several times, the captain shook his head and seemed to think the matter had a bad look.

Next, the captain, with some indistinct idea of finding a body, instituted a strict search over the whole house; groping in the cellars with a lighted candle, thrusting his hook behind doors, bringing his head into violent contact with beams, and covering himself with cobwebs. Mounting up to the old man's bedroom, they found that he had not been in bed on the previous night, but had merely lain down on the coverlet, as was evident from the impression yet remaining there.

"And *I* think, captain," said Rob, looking round the room, "that when Mr. Gills was going in and out so often, these last few days, he was taking little things away, piecemeal, not to attract attention."

"Ay!" said the captain, mysteriously. "Why so, my lad?"

"Why," returned Rob, looking about, "I don't see his shaving tackle. Nor his brushes, captain. Nor no shirts. Nor yet his shoes."

As each of these articles was mentioned, Captain Cuttle took particular notice of the corresponding department of the Grinder, lest he should appear to have been in recent use, or should prove to be in present possession thereof. But Rob had no occasion to shave, certainly was not brushed, and wore the clothes he had worn for a long time past, beyond all possibility of mistake.

"And what should you say," said the captain — "not committing yourself — about his time of sheering off? Hey?"

"Why, I think, captain," returned Rob, "that he must have gone pretty soon after I began to snore."

"What o'clock was that?" said the captain, prepared to be very particular about the exact time.

"How can I tell, captain!" answered Rob. "I only know that I'm a heavy sleeper at first, and a light one towards morning; and if Mr. Gills had come through the shop near daybreak, though ever so much on tiptoe, I'm pretty sure I should have heard him shut the door at all events."

On mature consideration of this evidence, Captain Cuttle began to think that the Instrument-maker must have vanished of his own accord; to which logical conclusion he was assisted by the letter addressed to himself, which, as being unquestionably in the old man's handwriting, would seem, with no great forcing, to bear the construction, that he arranged of his own will, to go, and so went. The captain had next to consider where and why? and as there was no way whatsoever that he saw to the solution of the first difficulty, he confined his meditations to the second.

Remembering the old man's curious manner, and the farewell he had taken of him: unaccountably fervent at the time, but quite intelligible now: a terrible apprehension strengthened on the captain, that, overpowered by his anxieties and regrets for Walter, he had been driven to commit suicide. Unequal to the wear and tear of daily life, as he had often professed himself to be, and shaken as he no doubt was by the uncertainty and deferred hope he had undergone, it seemed no violently strained misgiving, but only too probable.

Free from debt, and with no fear for his personal liberty, or the seizure of his goods, what else but such a state of madness could have hurried him away alone and secretly? As to his carrying some apparel with

him, if he had really done so — and they were not even sure of that — he might have done so, the captain argued, to prevent inquiry, to distract attention from his probable fate, or to ease the very mind that was now revolving all these possibilities. Such, reduced into plain language, and condensed within a small compass, was the final result and substance of Captain Cuttle's deliberations; which took a long time to arrive at this pass, and were, like some more public deliberations, very discursive and disorderly.

Dejected and despondent in the extreme, Captain Cuttle felt it just to release Rob from the arrest in which he had placed him, and to enlarge him, subject to a kind of honorable inspection which he still resolved to exercise; and having hired a man, from Brogley the broker, to sit in the shop during their absence, the captain, taking Rob with him, issued forth upon a dismal quest after the mortal remains of Solomon Gills.

Not a station-house or bone-house, or work-house in the metropolis escaped a visitation from the hard glazed hat. Along the wharves, among the shipping, on the bank side, up the river, down the river, here, there, everywhere, it went gleaming where men were thickest, like the hero's helmet in an epic battle. For a whole week the captain read of all the found and missing people in all the newspapers and handbills, and went forth on expeditions at all hours of the day to identify Solomon Gills, in poor little ship-boys who had fallen overboard, and in tall foreigners with dark beards who had taken poison — "to make sure," Captain Cuttle said, "that it warn't him." It is a sure thing that it never was, and that the good captain had no other satisfaction.

Captain Cuttle at last abandoned these attempts as

hopeless, and set himself to consider what was to be done next. After several new perusals of his poor friend's letter, he considered that the maintenance of "a home in the old place for Walter" was the primary duty imposed upon him. Therefore, the captain's decision was, that he would keep house on the premises of Solomon Gills himself, and would go into the instrument business, and see what came of it.

But as this step involved the relinquishment of his apartments at Mrs. MacStinger's, and he knew that resolute woman would never hear of his deserting them, the captain took the desperate determination of running away.

"Now, look ye here, my lad," said the captain to Rob, when he had matured this notable scheme, "to-morrow, I shan't be found in this here roadstead till night — not till arter midnight p'raps. But you keep watch till you hear me knock, and the moment you do, turn-to, and open the door."

"Very good, captain," said Rob.

"You'll continue to be rated on these here books," pursued the captain condescendingly, "and I don't say but what you may get promotion, if you and me should pull together with a will. But the moment you hear me knock to-morrow night, whatever time it is, turn-to and show yourself smart with the door."

"I'll be sure to do it, captain," replied Rob.

"Because you understand," resumed the captain, coming back again to enforce this charge upon his mind, "there may be, for anything I can say, a chase; and I might be took while I was waiting, if you didn't show yourself smart with the door."

Rob again assured the captain that he would be

prompt and wakeful; and the captain having made this prudent arrangement, went home to Mrs. MacStinger's for the last time.

The sense the captain had of its being the last time, and of the awful purpose hidden beneath his blue waistcoat, inspired him with such a mortal dread of Mrs. MacStinger, that the sound of that lady's foot downstairs at any time of the day, was sufficient to throw him into a fit of trembling. It fell out, too, that Mrs. MacStinger was in a charming temper — mild and placid as a house-lamb; and Captain Cuttle's conscience suffered terrible twinges, when she came up to inquire if she could cook him nothing for his dinner.

"A nice small kidney-pudding now, Cap'en Cuttle," said his landlady: "or a sheep's heart. Don't mind my trouble."

"No thank'ee, ma'am," returned the captain.

"Have a roast fowl," said Mrs. MacStinger, "with a bit of weal stuffing and some egg sauce. Come, Cap'en Cuttle! Give yourself a little treat!"

"No thank'ee, ma'am," returned the captain very humbly.

"I'm sure you're out of sorts, and want to be stimulated," said Mrs. MacStinger. "Why not have, for once in a way, a bottle of sherry-wine?"

"Well, ma'am," rejoined the captain, "if you'd be so good as take a glass or two, I think I would try that. Would you do me the favor, ma'am," said the captain, torn to pieces by his conscience, "to accept a quarter's rent ahead?"

"And why so, Cap'en Cuttle?" retorted Mrs. MacStinger — sharply as the captain thought.

The captain was frightened to death. "If you would,

ma'am," he said with submission, "it would oblige me. I can't keep my money very well. It pays itself out. I should take it kind if you'd comply."

"Well, Cap'en Cuttle," said the unconscious MacStinger, rubbing her hands, "you can do as you please. It's not for me, with my family, to refuse, no more than it is to ask."

"And would you, ma'am," said the captain, taking down the tin canister, in which he kept his cash, from the top-shelf of the cupboard, "be so good as offer eighteen-pence apiece to the little family all round? If you could make it convenient, ma'am, to pass the word presently for them children to come for'ard, in a body, I should be glad to see 'em."

These innocent MacStingers were so many daggers to the captain's breast, when they appeared in a swarm, and tore at him with the confiding trustfulness he so little deserved. The eye of Alexander MacStinger, who had been his favorite, was insupportable to the captain; the voice of Juliana MacStinger, who was the picture of her mother, made a coward of him.

Captain Cuttle kept up appearances, nevertheless, tolerably well, and for an hour or two was very hardly used and roughly handled by the young MacStingers: who in their childish frolics, did a little damage also to the glazed hat, by sitting in it, two at a time, as in a nest, and drumming on the inside of the crown with their shoes. At length the captain sorrowfully dismissed them: taking leave of these cherubs with the poignant remorse and grief of a man who was going to execution.

In the silence of night, the captain packed up his heavier property in a chest, which he locked, intending

to leave it there, in all probability forever, but on the forlorn chance of one day finding a man sufficiently bold and desperate to come and ask for it. Of his lighter necessaries, the captain made a bundle; and disposed his plate about his person, ready for flight. At the hour of midnight, when Brig-place was buried in slumber, and Mrs. MacStinger was lulled in sweet oblivion, with her infants around her, the guilty captain stealing down on tiptoe, in the dark, opened the door, closed it softly after him, and took to his heels.

Pursued by the image of Mrs. MacStinger springing out of bed, and, regardless of costume, following and bringing him back; pursued also by a consciousness of his enormous crime; Captain Cuttle held on at a great pace, and allowed no grass to grow under his feet, between Brig-place and the Instrument-maker's door. It opened when he knocked — for Rob was on the watch — and when it was bolted and locked behind him, Captain Cuttle felt comparatively safe.

"Whew!" cried the captain, looking round him. "It's a breather!"

"Nothing the matter, is there, captain?" cried the gaping Rob.

"No, no!" said Captain Cuttle, after changing color, and listening to a passing footstep in the street. "But mind ye, my lad; if any lady, except either of them two as you see t'other day, ever comes and asks for Cap'en Cuttle, be sure to report no person of that name known, nor never heard of here; observe them orders, will you?"

"I'll take care, captain," returned Rob.

"You might say — if you liked," hesitated the captain, "that you'd read in the paper that a cap'en of

that name was gone to Australia, emigrating along with a whole ship's complement of people as had all swore never to come back no more."

Rob nodded his understanding of these instructions; and Captain Cuttle promising to make a man of him if he obeyed orders, dismissed him, yawning, to his bed under the counter, and went aloft to the chamber of Solomon Gills.

What the captain suffered next day, whenever a bonnet passed, or how often he darted out of the shop to elude imaginary MacStingers, and sought safety in the attic, cannot be told. But to avoid the fatigues attendant on this means of self-preservation, the captain curtained the glass door of communication between the shop and parlor, on the inside, fitted a key to it from the bunch that had been sent to him; and cut a small hole of espial in the wall. The advantage of this fortification is obvious. On a bonnet appearing, the captain instantly slipped into his garrison, locked himself up, and took a secret observation of the enemy. Finding it a false alarm, the captain instantly slipped out again. And the bonnets in the street were so very numerous, and alarms were so inseparable from their appearance, that the captain was almost incessantly slipping in and out all day long.

Captain Cuttle found time, however, in the midst of this fatiguing service to inspect the stock; in connection with which he had the general idea (very laborious to Rob) that too much friction could not be bestowed upon it, and that it could not be made too bright. He also ticketed a few attractive looking articles at a venture, at prices ranging from ten shillings to fifty pounds, and exposed them in the window to the great astonishment of the public.

After effecting these improvements, Captain Cuttle, surrounded by the instruments, began to feel scientific; and looked up at the stars at night, through the skylight, when he was smoking his pipe in the little back-parlor before going to bed, as if he had established a kind of property in them. As a tradesman in the city, too, he began to have an interest in the Lord Mayor, and the Sheriffs, and in public companies; and felt bound to read the quotations of the Funds every day, though he was unable to make out, on any principle of navigation, what the figures meant, and could have very well dispensed with the fractions. Florence, the captain waited on, with his strange news of Uncle Sol, immediately after taking possession of the Midshipman; but she was away from home. So the captain sat himself down in his altered station of life, with no company but Rob the Grinder; and losing count of time, as men do, when great changes come upon them, thought musingly of Walter, and of Solomon Gills, and even of Mrs. MacStinger herself, as among the things that had been.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SHADOWS OF THE PAST AND FUTURE.

"YOUR most obedient, sir," said the major. "Damme, sir, a friend of my friend Dombey's is a friend of mine, and I'm glad to see you!"

"I am infinitely obliged, Carker," explained Mr. Dombey, "to Major Bagstock for his company and conversation. Major Bagstock has rendered me great service, Carker."

Mr. Carker the Manager, hat in hand, just arrived at Leamington, and just introduced to the major, showed the major his whole double range of teeth, and trusted he might take the liberty of thanking him with all his heart for having effected so great an improvement in Mr. Dombey's looks and spirits.

"By Gad, sir," said the major, in reply, "there are no thanks due to me, for it's a give and take affair. A great creature like our friend Dombey, sir," said the major, lowering his voice, but not lowering it so much as to render it inaudible to that gentleman, "cannot help improving and exalting his friends. He strengthens and invigorates a man, sir, does Dombey, in his moral nature."

Mr. Carker snapped at the expression. In his moral nature. Exactly. The very words he had been on the point of suggesting.

"But when my friend Dombey, sir," added the major,

"talks to you of Major Bagstock, I must crave leave to set him and you right. He means plain Joe, sir — Joey B. — Josh. Bagstock — Joseph — rough and tough Old J., sir. At your service."

Mr. Carker's excessively friendly inclinations towards the major, and Mr. Carker's admiration of his roughness, toughness, and plainness, gleamed out of every tooth in Mr. Carker's head.

"And now, sir," said the major, "you and Dombey have the devil's own amount of business to talk over."

"By no means, major," observed Mr. Dombey.

"Dombey," said the major defiantly, "I know better; a man of your mark — the Colossus of commerce — is not to be interrupted. Your moments are precious. We shall meet at dinner-time. In the interval old Joseph will be scarce. The dinner-hour is a sharp seven, Mr. Carker."

With that, the major, greatly swollen as to his face, withdrew; but immediately putting in his head at the door again, said:

"I beg your pardon. Dombey, have you any message to 'em?"

Mr. Dombey in some embarrassment, and not without a glance at the courteous keeper of his business confidence, intrusted the major with his compliments.

"By the Lord, sir," said the major, "you must make it something warmer than that, or old Joe will be far from welcome."

"Regards then, if you will, major," returned Mr. Dombey.

"Damme, sir," said the major, shaking his shoulders and his great cheeks jocularly: "make it something warmer than that."

"What you please, then, major," observed Mr. Dombey.

"Our friend is sly sir, sly sir, de-vilish sly," said the major, staring round the door at Carker. "So is Bagstock." But stopping in the midst of a chuckle, and drawing himself up to his full height, the major solemnly exclaimed, as he struck himself on the chest, "Dombey! I envy your feelings. God bless you!" and withdrew.

"You must have found the gentleman a great resource," said Carker, following him with his teeth.

"Very great indeed," said Mr. Dombey.

"He has friends here, no doubt," pursued Carker. "I perceive, from what he has said, that you go into society here. Do you know," smiling horribly, "I am so very glad that you go into society!"

Mr. Dombey acknowledged this display of interest on the part of his second in command, by twirling his watch-chain, and slightly moving his head.

"You were formed for society," said Carker. "Of all the men I know, you are the best adapted by nature and by position, for society. Do you know I have been frequently amazed that you should have held it at arm's length so long!"

"I have had my reasons, Carker. I have been alone, and indifferent to it. But you have great social qualifications yourself, and are the more likely to have been surprised."

"Oh! *I!*" returned the other, with ready self-disparagement. "It's quite another matter in the case of a man like me. I don't come into comparison with *you*."

Mr. Dombey put his hand to his neckcloth, settled his

chin in it, coughed, and stood looking at his faithful friend and servant for a few moments in silence.

"I shall have the pleasure, Carker," said Mr. Dombey at length: making as if he swallowed something a little too large for his throat: "to present you to my — to the major's friends. Highly agreeable people."

"Ladies among them, I presume?" insinuated the smooth Manager.

"They are all — that is to say, they are both — ladies," replied Mr. Dombey.

"Only two?" smiled Carker.

"There are only two. I have confined my visits to their residence, and have made no other acquaintance here."

"Sisters, perhaps?" quoth Carker.

"Mother and daughter," replied Mr. Dombey.

As Mr. Dombey dropped his eyes, and adjusted his neckcloth again, the smiling face of Mr. Carker the Manager became in a moment, and without any stage of transition, transformed into a most intent and frowning face, scanning his closely, and with an ugly sneer. As Mr. Dombey raised his eyes, it changed back, no less quickly, to its old expression, and showed him every gum of which it stood possessed.

"You are very kind," said Carker. "I shall be delighted to know them. Speaking of daughters, I have seen Miss Dombey."

There was a sudden rush of blood to Mr. Dombey's face.

"I took the liberty of waiting on her," said Carker, "to inquire if she could charge me with any little commission. I am not so fortunate as to be the bearer of any but her — but her dear love."

Wolf's face that it was then, with even the hot tongue revealing itself through the stretched mouth, as the eyes encountered Mr. Dombey's!

"What business intelligence is there?" inquired the latter gentleman, after a silence, during which Mr. Carker had produced some memoranda and other papers.

"There is very little," returned Carker. "Upon the whole we have not had our usual good fortune of late, but that is of little moment to you. At Lloyd's they give up the Son and Heir for lost. Well, she was insured from her keel to her masthead."

"Carker," said Mr. Dombey, taking a chair near him, "I cannot say that young man, Gay, ever impressed me favorably" —

"Nor me," interposed the Manager.

"But I wish," said Mr. Dombey, without heeding the interruption, "he had never gone on board that ship. I wish he had never been sent out."

"It is a pity you didn't say so, in good time, is it not?" retorted Carker, coolly. "However, I think it's all for the best. I really think it's all for the best. Did I mention that there was something like a little confidence between Miss Dombey and myself."

"No," said Mr. Dombey, sternly.

"I have no doubt," returned Mr. Carker, after an impressive pause, "that wherever Gay is, he is much better where he is, than at home here. If I were, or could be, in your place, I should be satisfied of that. I am quite satisfied of it myself. Miss Dombey is confiding and young — perhaps hardly proud enough, for your daughter — if she have a fault. Not that that is much though, I am sure. Will you check these balances with me?"

Mr. Dombey leaned back in his chair, instead of bending over the papers that were laid before him, and looked the Manager steadily in the face. The Manager, with his eyelids slightly raised, affected to be glancing at his figures, and to await the leisure of his principal. He showed that he affected this, as if from great delicacy, and with a design to spare Mr. Dombey's feelings; and the latter, as he looked at him, was cognizant of his intended consideration, and felt that but for it, this confidential Carker would have said a great deal more, which he, Mr. Dombey, was too proud to ask for. It was his way in business, often. Little by little, Mr. Dombey's gaze relaxed, and his attention became diverted to the papers before him; but while busy with the occupation they afforded him, he frequently stopped, and looked at Mr. Carker again. Whenever he did so, Mr. Carker was demonstrative, as before, in his delicacy, and impressed it on his great chief more and more.

While they were thus engaged; and under the skilful culture of the Manager, angry thoughts in reference to poor Florence brooded and bred in Mr. Dombey's breast, usurping the place of the cold dislike that generally reigned there; Major Bagstock, much admired by the old ladies of Leamington, and followed by the native, carrying the usual amount of light baggage, straddled along the shady side of the way, to make a morning-call on Mrs. Skewton. It being mid-day when the major reached the bower of Cleopatra, he had the good fortune to find his princess on her usual sofa, languishing over a cup of coffee, with the room so darkened and shaded for her more luxurious repose, that Withers, who was in attendance on her, loomed like a phantom page.

"What insupportable creature is this, coming in!"

said Mrs. Skewton. "I cannot bear it. Go away, whoever you are!"

"You have not the heart to banish J. B., ma'am!" said the major, halting midway, to remonstrate, with his cane over his shoulder.

"Oh it's you, is it? On second thoughts you may enter," observed Cleopatra.

The major entered accordingly, and advancing to the sofa pressed her charming hand to his lips.

"Sit down," said Cleopatra, listlessly waving her fan, "a long way off. Don't come too near me, for I am frightfully faint and sensitive this morning, and you smell of the sun. You are absolutely tropical."

"By George, ma'am," said the major, "the time has been when Joseph Bagstock has been grilled and blistered by the sun; the time was, when he was forced, ma'am, into such full blow, by high hot-house heat in the West Indies, that he was known as the flower. A man never heard of Bagstock, ma'am, in those days; he heard of the flower — the flower of Our's. The flower may have faded, more or less, ma'am," observed the major, dropping into a much nearer chair than had been indicated by his cruel divinity, "but it is a tough plant yet, and constant as the evergreen."

Here the major, under cover of the dark room, shut up one eye, rolled his head like a harlequin, and, in his great self-satisfaction, perhaps went nearer to the confines of apoplexy than he had ever gone before.

"Where is Mrs. Granger?" inquired Cleopatra of her page.

Withers believed she was in her own room.

"Very well," said Mrs. Skewton. "Go away, and shut the door. I am engaged."

As Withers disappeared, Mrs. Skewton turned her head languidly towards the major, without otherwise moving, and asked him how his friend was.

"Dombey, ma'am," returned the major, with a facetious gurgling in his throat, "is as well as a man in his condition *can* be. His condition is a desperate one, ma'am. He is touched, is Dombey. Touched?" cried the major. "He is bayonetted through the body."

Cleopatra cast a sharp look at the major, that contrasted forcibly with the affected drawl in which she presently said: —

"Major Bagstock, although I know but little of the world, — nor can I really regret my inexperience, for I fear it is a false place: full of withering conventionalities: where nature is but little regarded, and where the music of the heart, and the gushing of the soul, and all that sort of thing, which is so truly poetical, is seldom heard, — I cannot misunderstand your meaning. There is an allusion to Edith — to my extremely dear child," said Mrs. Skewton, tracing the outline of her eyebrows with her forefinger, "in your words, to which the tenderest of chords vibrates excessively!"

"Bluntness, ma'am," returned the major, "has ever been the characteristic of the Bagstock breed. You are right. Joe admits it."

"And that allusion," pursued Cleopatra, "would involve one of the most — if not positively *the* most — touching, and thrilling, and sacred emotions of which our sadly-fallen nature is susceptible, I conceive."

The major laid his hand upon his lips, and wafted a kiss to Cleopatra, as if to identify the emotion in question.

"I feel that I am weak. I feel that I am wanting in

that energy which should sustain a mama: not to say a parent: on such a subject," said Mrs. Skewton, trimming her lips with the laced edge of her pocket-handkerchief; "but I can hardly approach a topic so excessively momentous to my dearest Edith without a feeling of faintness. Nevertheless, bad man, as you have boldly remarked upon it, and as it has occasioned me great anguish:" Mrs. Skewton touched her left side with her fan: "I will not shrink from my duty."

The major, under cover of the dimness, swelled, and swelled, and rolled his purple face about, and winked his lobster eye, until he fell into a fit of wheezing, which obliged him to rise and take a turn or two about the room, before his fair friend could proceed.

"Mr. Dombey," said Mrs. Skewton, when she at length resumed, "was obliging enough, now many weeks ago, to do us the honor of visiting us here; in company, my dear major, with yourself. I acknowledge — let me be open — that it is my failing to be the creature of impulse, and to wear my heart, as it were, outside. I know my failing full well. My enemy cannot know it better. But I am not penitent; I would rather not be frozen by the heartless world, and am content to bear this imputation justly."

Mrs. Skewton arranged her tucker, pinched her wiry throat to give it a soft surface, and went on with great complacency.

"It gave me (my dearest Edith too, I am sure) infinite pleasure to receive Mr. Dombey. As a friend of yours, my dear major, we were naturally disposed to be prepossessed in his favor; and I fancied that I observed an amount of heart in Mr. Dombey, that was excessively refreshing."

"There is devilish little heart in Dombey now, ma'am," said the major.

"Wretched man!" cried Mrs. Skewton, looking at him languidly, "pray be silent."

"J. B. is dumb, ma'am," said the major.

"Mr. Dombey," pursued Cleopatra, smoothing the rosy hue upon her cheeks, "accordingly repeated his visit; and possibly finding some attraction in the simplicity and primitiveness of our tastes — for there is always a charm in nature — it is so very sweet — became one of our little circle every evening. Little did I think of the awful responsibility into which I plunged when I encouraged Mr. Dombey — to" —

"To beat up these quarters, ma'am," suggested Major Bagstock.

"Coarse person!" said Mrs. Skewton, "you anticipate my meaning, though in odious language."

Here Mrs. Skewton rested her elbow on the little table at her side, and suffering her wrist to droop in what she considered a graceful and becoming manner, dangled her fan to and fro, and lazily admired her hand while speaking.

"The agony I have endured," she said mincingly, "as the truth has by degrees dawned upon me, has been too exceedingly terrific to dilate upon. My whole existence is bound up in my sweetest Edith; and to see her change from day to day — my beautiful pet, who has positively garnered up her heart since the death of that most delightful creature, Granger — is the most affecting thing in the world."

Mrs. Skewton's world was not a very trying one, if one might judge of it by the influence of its most affecting circumstance upon her; but this by the way.

"Edith," simpered Mrs. Skewton, "who is the perfect pearl of my life, is said to resemble me. I believe we *are* alike."

"There is one man in the world who never will admit that any one resembles you, ma'am," said the major; "and that man's name is old Joe Bagstock."

Cleopatra made as if she would brain the flatterer with her fan, but relenting, smiled upon him and proceeded:

"If my charming girl inherits any advantages from me, wicked one!": the major was the wicked one: "she inherits also my foolish nature. She has great force of character — mine has been said to be immense, though I don't believe it — but once moved, she is susceptible and sensitive to the last extent. What are my feelings when I see her pining! They destroy me."

The major advancing his double chin, and pursing up his blue lips into a soothing expression, affected the profoundest sympathy.

"The confidence," said Mrs. Skewton, "that has subsisted between us — the free development of soul, and openness of sentiment — is touching to think of. We have been more like sisters than mama and child."

"J. B.'s own sentiment," observed the major, "expressed by J. B. fifty thousand times!"

"Do not interrupt, rude man!" said Cleopatra. "What are my feelings, then, when I find that there is one subject avoided by us! That there is a what's his name — a gulf — opened between us. That my own artless Edith is changed to me! They are of the most poignant description, of course."

The major left his chair, and took one nearer to the little table.

"From day to day I see this, my dear major," proceeded Mrs. Skewton. "From day to day I feel this. From hour to hour I reproach myself for that excess of faith and trustfulness which has led to such distressing consequences; and almost from minute to minute, I hope that Mr. Dombey may explain himself, and relieve the torture I undergo, which is extremely wearing. But nothing happens, my dear major; I am the slave of remorse — take care of the coffee-cup: you are so very awkward — my darling Edith is an altered being; and I really don't see what is to be done, or what good creature I can advise with."

Major Bagstock, encouraged perhaps by the softened and confidential tone into which Mrs. Skewton, after several times lapsing into it for a moment, seemed now to have subsided for good: stretched out his hand across the little table, and said with a leer,

"Advise with Joe, ma'am."

"Then, you aggravating monster," said Cleopatra, giving one hand to the major, and tapping his knuckles with her fan, which she held in the other: "why don't you talk to me? you know what I mean. Why don't you tell me something to the purpose?"

The major laughed and kissed the hand she had bestowed upon him, and laughed again, immensely.

"Is there as much Heart in Mr. Dombey as I gave him credit for?" languished Cleopatra tenderly. "Do you think he is in earnest, my dear major? Would you recommend his being spoken to, or his being left alone? Now tell me, like a dear man, what you would advise."

"Shall we marry him to Edith Granger, ma'am?" chuckled the major, hoarsely.

"Mysterious creature?" returned Cleopatra, bringing her fan to bear upon the major's nose. "How can *we* marry him?"

"Shall we marry him to Edith Granger, ma'am, I say?" chuckled the major again.

Mrs. Skewton returned no answer in words, but smiled upon the major with so much archness and vivacity, that that gallant officer considering himself challenged, would have imprinted a kiss on her exceedingly red lips, but for her interposing the fan with a very winning and juvenile dexterity. It might have been in modesty; it might have been in apprehension of some danger to their bloom.

"Dombey, ma'am," said the major, "is a great catch."

"Oh, mercenary wretch!" cried Cleopatra, with a little shriek, "I am shocked."

"And Dombey, ma'am," pursued the major, thrusting forward his head, and distending his eyes, "is in earnest. Joseph says it; Bagstock knows it; J. B. keeps him to the mark. Leave Dombey to himself, ma'am. Dombey is safe, ma'am. Do as you have done; do no more; and trust to J. B. for the end."

"You really think so, my dear major?" returned Cleopatra, who had eyed him very cautiously, and very searchingly, in spite of her listless bearing.

"Sure of it, ma'am," rejoined the major. "Cleopatra the peerless, and her Antony Bagstock, will often speak of this, triumphantly, when sharing the elegance and wealth of Edith Dombey's establishment. Dombey's right-hand man, ma'am," said the major, stopping abruptly in a chuckle, and becoming serious, "has arrived."

"This morning?" said Cleopatra.

"This morning, ma'am," returned the major. "And

Dombey's anxiety for his arrival, ma'am, is to be referred — take J. B.'s word for this; for Joe is de-vilish sly "— the major tapped his nose, and screwed up one of his eyes tight: which did not enhance his native beauty — " to his desire that what is in the wind should become known to him, without Dombey's telling and consulting him. For Dombey is as proud, ma'am," said the major, " as Lucifer."

" A charming quality," lisped Mrs. Skewton; " reminding one of dearest Edith."

" Well, ma'am," said the major. " I have thrown out hints already, and the right-hand man understands 'em; and I'll throw out more before the day is done. Dombey projected this morning a ride to Warwick Castle, and to Kenilworth, to-morrow, to be preceded by a breakfast with us. I undertook the delivery of this invitation. Will you honor us so far, ma'am?" said the major, swelling with shortness of breath and slyness, as he produced a note, addressed to the Honorable Mrs. Skewton, by favor of Major Bagstock, wherein hers ever faithfully, Paul Dombey, besought her and her amiable and accomplished daughter to consent to the proposed excursion; and in a postscript unto which the same ever faithfully Paul Dombey entreated to be recalled to the remembrance of Mrs. Granger.

" Hush!" said Cleopatra, suddenly, " Edith!"

The loving mother can scarcely be described as resuming her insipid and affected air when she made this exclamation; for she had never cast it off; nor was it likely that she ever would or could, in any other place than in the grave. But hurriedly dismissing whatever shadow of earnestness, or faint confession of a purpose, laudable or wicked, that her face, or voice, or manner,

had, for the moment, betrayed, she lounged upon the couch, her most insipid and most languid self again, as Edith entered the room.

Edith, so beautiful and stately, but so cold and so repelling. Who, slightly acknowledging the presence of Major Bagstock, and directing a keen glance at her mother, drew back the curtain from a window, and sat down there, looking out.

"My dearest Edith," said Mrs. Skewton, "where on earth have you been? I have wanted you, my love, most sadly."

"You said you were engaged, and I stayed away," she answered, without turning her head.

"It was cruel to Old Joe, ma'am," said the major in his gallantry.

"It was very cruel, I know," she said, still looking out — and said with such calm disdain that the major was discomfited, and could think of nothing in reply.

"Major Bagstock, my darling Edith," drawled her mother, "who is generally the most useless and disagreeable creature in the world: as you know"—

"It is surely not worth while, mama," said Edith, looking round, "to observe these forms of speech. We are quite alone. We know each other."

The quiet scorn that sat upon her handsome face — a scorn that evidently lighted on herself, no less than them — was so intense and deep, that her mother's simper, for the instant, though of a hardy constitution, drooped before it.

"My darling girl," she began again.

"Not woman yet?" said Edith, with a smile.

"How very odd you are to-day, my dear! Pray let me say, my love, that Major Bagstock has brought the

kindest of notes from Mr. Dombey, proposing that we should breakfast with him to-morrow, and ride to Warwick and Kenilworth. Will you go, Edith?"

"Will I go!" she repeated, turning very red, and breathing quickly as she looked round at her mother.

"I knew you would, my own," observed the latter carelessly. "It is, as you say, quite a form to ask. Here is Mr. Dombey's letter, Edith."

"Thank you. I have no desire to read it," was her answer.

"Then perhaps I had better answer it myself," said Mrs. Skewton, "though I had thought of asking *you* to be my secretary, darling." As Edith made no movement and no answer, Mrs. Skewton begged the major to wheel her little table nearer, and to set open the desk it contained, and to take out pen and paper for her; all which congenial offices of gallantry the major discharged, with much submission and devotion.

"Your regards, Edith, my dear?" said Mrs. Skewton, pausing, pen in hand, at the postscript.

"What you will, mama," she answered, without turning her head, and with supreme indifference.

Mrs. Skewton wrote what she would, without seeking for any more explicit directions, and handed her letter to the major, who receiving it as a precious charge, made a show of laying it near his heart, but was fain to put it in the pocket of his pantaloons on account of the insecurity of his waistcoat. The major then took a very polished and chivalrous farewell of both ladies, which the elder one acknowledged in her usual manner, while the younger, sitting with her face addressed to the window, bent her head so slightly that it would have been a greater compliment to the major to have

made no sign at all, and to have left him to infer that he had not been heard or thought of.

"As to alteration in her, sir," mused the major, on his way back; on which expedition — the afternoon being sunny and hot — he ordered the native and the light baggage to the front, and walked in the shadow of that expatriated prince: "as to alteration, sir, and pining, and so forth, that won't go down with Joseph Bagstock. None of that, sir. It won't do here. But as to there being something of a division between 'em — or a gulf as the mother calls it — damme, sir, that seems true enough. And it's odd enough! Well, sir!" panted the major, "Edith Granger and Dombey are well matched; let 'em fight it out! Bagstock backs the winner!"

The major, by saying these latter words aloud, in the vigor of his thoughts, caused the unhappy native to stop, and turn round, in the belief that he was personally addressed. Exasperated to the last degree by this act of insubordination, the major (though he was swelling with enjoyment of his own humor, at the moment of its occurrence) instantly thrust his cane among the native's ribs, and continued to stir him up at short intervals, all the way to the hotel.

Nor was the major less exasperated as he dressed for dinner, during which operation the dark servant underwent the pelting of a shower of miscellaneous objects, varying in size from a boot to a hairbrush, and including everything that came within his master's reach. For the major plumed himself on having the native in a perfect state of drill, and visited the least departure from strict discipline with this kind of fatigue duty. Add to this, that he maintained the native about his person

as a counter-irritant against the gout, and all other vexations, mental as well as bodily; and the native would appear to have earned his pay — which was not large.

At length the major having disposed of all the missiles that were convenient to his hand, and having called the native so many new names as must have given him great occasion to marvel at the resources of the English language, submitted to have his cravat put on; and being dressed, and finding himself in a brisk flow of spirits after this exercise, went down-stairs to enliven "Dombey" and his right-hand man.

Dombey was not yet in the room, but the right-hand man was there, and his dental treasures were, as usual, ready for the major.

"Well, sir!" said the major. "How have you passed the time since I had the happiness of meeting you? Have you walked at all?"

"A saunter of barely half an hour's duration," returned Carker. "We have been so much occupied."

"Business, eh?" said the major.

"A variety of little matters necessary to be gone through," replied Carker. "But do you know — this is quite unusual with me, educated in a distrustful school, and who am not generally disposed to be communicative," he said, breaking off, and speaking in a charming tone of frankness — "but I feel quite confidential with you, Major Bagstock."

"You do me honor, sir," returned the major. "You may be."

"Do you know then," pursued Carker, "that I have not found my friend — *our* friend, I ought rather to call him" —

"Meaning Dombey, sir?" cried the major. "You see me, Mr. Carker, standing here! J. B?"

He was puffy enough to see, and blue enough; and Mr. Carker intimated that he had that pleasure.

"Then you see a man, sir, who would go through fire and water to serve Dombey," returned Major Bagstock.

Mr. Carker smiled, and said he was sure of it. "Do you know, major," he proceeded: "to resume where I left off: that I have not found our friend so attentive to business to-day, as usual?"

"No?" observed the delighted major.

"I have found him a little abstracted, and with his attention disposed to wander," said Carker.

"By Jove, sir," cried the major, "there's a lady in the case."

"Indeed, I begin to believe there really is," returned Carker. "I thought you might be jesting when you seemed to hint at it; for I know you military men"—

The major gave the horse's cough, and shook his head and shoulders, as much as to say, "Well! we *are* gay dogs, there's no denying." He then seized Mr. Carker by the button-hole, and with starting eyes whispered in his ear that she was a woman of extraordinary charms, sir. That she was a young widow, sir. That she was of a fine family, sir. That Dombey was over head and ears in love with her, sir, and that it would be a good match on both sides; for she had beauty, blood, and talent, and Dombey had fortune; and what more could any couple have? Hearing Mr. Dombey's footsteps without, the major cut himself short by saying, that Mr. Carker would see her to-morrow morning, and would judge for himself; and between his mental excitement,

and the exertion of saying all this in wheezy whispers, the major sat gurgling in the throat and watering at the eyes, until dinner was ready.

The major, like some other noble animals, exhibited himself to great advantage at feeding-time. On this occasion, he shone resplendent at one end of the table, supported by the milder lustre of Mr. Dombey at the other; while Carker on one side lent his ray to either light, or suffered it to merge into both, as occasion arose.

During the first course or two, the major was usually grave; for the native, in obedience to general orders, secretly issued, collected every sauce and cruet round him, and gave him a great deal to do, in taking out the stoppers, and mixing up the contents in his plate. Besides which, the native had private zests and flavors on a side-table, with which the major daily scorched himself; to say nothing of strange machines out of which he spirted unknown liquids into the major's drink. But on this occasion, Major Bagstock, even amidst these many occupations, found time to be social; and his sociality consisted in excessive slyness for the behoof of Mr. Carker, and the betrayal of Mr. Dombey's state of mind.

"Dombey," said the major, "you don't eat; what's the matter?"

"Thank you," returned that gentleman, "I am doing very well; I have no great appetite to-day."

"Why, Dombey, what's become of it?" asked the major. "Where's it gone? You haven't left it with our friends, I'll swear, for I can answer for their having none to-day at luncheon. I can answer for one of 'em, at least; I won't say which."

Then the major winked at Carker, and became so frightfully sly, that his dark attendant was obliged to pat him on the back, without orders, or he would probably have disappeared under the table.

In a later stage of the dinner: that is to say, when the native stood at the major's elbow ready to serve the first bottle of champagne: the major became still slyer.

"Fill this to the brim, you scoundrel," said the major, holding up his glass. "Fill Mr. Carker's to the brim too. And Mr. Dombey's too. By Gad, gentlemen," said the major, winking at his new friend, while Mr. Dombey looked into his plate with a conscious air, "we'll consecrate this glass of wine to a divinity whom Joe is proud to know, and at a distance humbly and reverently to admire. Edith," said the major, "is her name; angelic Edith!"

"To angelic Edith!" cried the smiling Carker.

"Edith, by all means," said Mr. Dombey.

The entrance of the waiters with new dishes caused the major to be slyer yet, but in a more serious vein. "For though, among ourselves, Joe Bagstock mingles jest and earnest on this subject, sir," said the major, laying his finger on his lips, and speaking half apart to Carker, "he holds that name too sacred to be made the property of these fellows, or of any fellows. Not a word, sir, while they are here!"

This was respectful and becoming on the major's part, and Mr. Dombey plainly felt it so. Although embarrassed in his own frigid way, by the major's allusions, Mr. Dombey had no objection to such rallying, it was clear, but rather courted it. Perhaps the major had been pretty near the truth, when he had divined that

morning that the great man who was too haughty formerly to consult with, or confide in his prime minister, on such a matter, yet wished him to be fully possessed of it. Let this be how it may, he often glanced at Mr. Carker while the major plied his light artillery, and seemed watchful of its effect upon him.

But the major, having secured an attentive listener, and a smiler who had not his match in all the world — "in short, a de-vilish intelligent and agreeable fellow," as he often afterwards declared — was not going to let him off with a little slyness personal to Mr. Dombey. Therefore, on the removal of the cloth, the major developed himself as a choice spirit in the broader and more comprehensive range of narrating regimental stories, and cracking regimental jokes, which he did with such prodigal exuberance, that Carker was (or feigned to be) quite exhausted with laughter and admiration: while Mr. Dombey looked on over his starched cravat, like the major's proprietor, or like a stately showman who was glad to see his bear dancing well.

When the major was too hoarse with meat and drink, and the display of his social powers to render himself intelligible any longer, they adjourned to coffee. After which, the major inquired of Mr. Carker the manager, with little apparent hope of an answer in the affirmative, if he played picquet.

"Yes, I play picquet a little," said Mr. Carker.

"Backgammon, perhaps?" observed the major, hesitating.

"Yes, I play backgammon a little too," replied the man of teeth.

"Carker plays at all games, I believe," said Mr. Dombey, laying himself on a sofa like a man of wood

without a hinge or a joint in him; "and plays them well."

In sooth, he played the two in question, to such perfection, that the major was astonished, and asked him, at random, if he played chess.

"Yes, I play chess a little," answered Carker. "I have sometimes played, and won a game — it's a mere trick — without seeing the board."

"By Gad, sir!" said the major, staring, "you're a contrast to Dombey, who plays nothing."

"Oh! *He!* returned the manager. *He* has never had occasion to acquire such little arts. To men like me, they are sometimes useful. As at present, Major Bagstock, when they enable me to take a hand with you."

It might be only the false mouth, so smooth and wide; and yet there seemed to lurk beneath the humility and subserviency of this short speech, a something like a snarl; and for a moment, one might have thought that the white teeth were prone to bite the hand they fawned upon. But the major thought nothing about it, and Mr. Dombey lay meditating with his eyes half shut, during the whole of the play, which lasted until bed-time.

By that time, Mr. Carker, though the winner, had mounted high into the major's good opinion, insomuch, that when he left the major at his own room before going to bed, the major, as a special attention, sent the native — who always rested on a mattress spread upon the ground at his master's door — along the gallery, to light him to his room in state.

There was a faint blur on the surface of the mirror in Mr. Carker's chamber, and its reflection was, perhaps,

a false one. But it showed, that night, the image of a man, who saw, in his fancy, a crowd of people slumbering on the ground at his feet, like the poor native at his master's door: who picked his way among them: looking down maliciously enough: but trod upon no upturned face — as yet.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DEEPER SHADOWS.

Mr. Carker the manager rose with the lark, and went out, walking in the summer day. His meditations — and he meditated with contracted brows while he strolled along — hardly seemed to soar as high as the lark, or to mount in that direction; rather they kept close to their nest upon the earth, and looked about, among the dust and worms. But there was not a bird in the air, singing unseen, farther beyond the reach of human eye than Mr. Carker's thoughts. He had his face so perfectly under control, that few could say more, in distinct terms, of its expression, than that it smiled or that it pondered. It pondered now, intently. As the lark rose higher, he sank deeper in thought. As the lark poured out her melody clearer and stronger, he fell into a graver and profounder silence. At length, when the lark came headlong down, with an accumulating stream of song, and dropped among the green wheat near him, rippling in the breath of the morning like a river, he sprang up from his revery, and looked round with a sudden smile, as courteous and as soft as if he had had numerous observers to propitiate; nor did he relapse, after being thus awakened; but clearing his face, like one who bethought himself that it might otherwise wrinkle and tell tales, went smiling on, as if for practice.

Perhaps with an eye to first impressions, Mr. Carker was very carefully and trimly dressed, that morning. Though always somewhat formal in his dress, in imitation of the great man whom he served, he stopped short of the extent of Mr. Dombey's stiffness: at once, perhaps, because he knew it to be ludicrous, and because in doing so he found another means of expressing his sense of the difference and distance between them. Some people quoted him indeed, in this respect, as a pointed commentary, and not a flattering one, on his icy patron — but the world is prone to misconstruction, and Mr. Carker was not accountable for its bad propensity.

Clean and florid: with his light complexion, fading as it were, in the sun, and his dainty step enhancing the softness of the turf: Mr. Carker the manager strolled about meadows, and green lanes, and glided among avenues of trees, until it was time to return to breakfast. Taking a nearer way back, Mr. Carker pursued it, airing his teeth, and said aloud as he did so, "Now to see the second Mrs. Dombey!"

He had strolled beyond the town, and reëntered it by a pleasant walk, where there was a deep shade of leafy trees, and where there were a few benches here and there for those who chose to rest. It not being a place of general resort at any hour, and wearing at that time of the still morning the air of being quite deserted and retired, Mr. Carker had it, or thought he had it, all to himself. So, with the whim of an idle man, to whom there yet remained twenty minutes for reaching a destination easily accessible in ten, Mr. Carker threaded the great boles of the trees, and went passing in and out, before this one and behind that, weaving a chain of footsteps on the dewy ground.

But he found he was mistaken in supposing there was no one in the grove, for as he softly rounded the trunk of one large tree, on which the obdurate bark was knotted and over-lapped like the hide of a rhinoceros or some kindred monster of the ancient days before the flood, he saw an unexpected figure sitting on a bench near at hand, about which, in another moment, he would have wound the chain he was making.

It was that of a lady, elegantly dressed and very handsome, whose dark proud eyes were fixed upon the ground, and in whom some passion or struggle was raging. For as she sat looking down, she held a corner of her under-lip within her mouth, her bosom heaved, her nostril quivered, her head trembled, indignant tears were on her cheek, and her foot was set upon the moss as though she would have crushed it into nothing. And yet almost the selfsame glance that showed him this, showed him the selfsame lady rising with a scornful air of weariness and lassitude, and turning away with nothing expressed in face or figure but careless beauty and imperious disdain.

A withered and very ugly old woman, dressed not so much like a gypsy as like any of that medley race of vagabonds who tramp about the country, begging, and stealing, and tinkering, and weaving rushes, by turns, or all together, had been observing the lady, too; for, as she rose, this second figure, strangely confronting the first, scrambled up from the ground — out of it, it almost appeared — and stood in the way.

"Let me tell your fortune, my pretty lady," said the old woman, munching with her jaws, as if the Death's head beneath her yellow skin were impatient to get out.

"I can tell it for myself," was the reply.

"Ay, ay, pretty lady; but not right. You didn't tell it right when you were sitting there. I see you! Give me a piece of silver, pretty lady, and I'll tell your fortune true. There's riches, pretty lady, in your face."

"I know," returned the lady, passing her with a dark smile, and a proud step. "I knew it before."

"What! You won't give me nothing?" cried the old woman. "You won't give me nothing to tell your fortune, pretty lady? How much will you give me *not* to tell it, then? Give me something, or I'll call it after you!" croaked the old woman, passionately.

Mr. Carker, whom the lady was about to pass close, slinking against his tree as she crossed to gain the path, advanced so as to meet her, and pulling off his hat as she went by, bade the old woman hold her peace. The lady acknowledged his interference with an inclination of the head, and went her way.

"You give me something then, or I'll call it after her!" screamed the old woman, throwing up her arms, and pressing forward against his outstretched hand. "Or come," she added, dropping her voice suddenly, looking at him earnestly, and seeming in a moment to forget the object of her wrath, "give me something, or I'll call it after *you!*"

"After *me*, old lady?" returned the manager, putting his hand in his pocket.

"Yes," said the woman, steadfast in her scrutiny, and holding out her shrivelled hand. "*I* know!"

"What do you know?" demanded Carker, throwing her a shilling. "Do you know who the handsome lady is?"

Munching like that sailor's wife of yore, who had chestnuts in her lap, and scowling like the witch who asked for some in vain, the old woman picked the shilling up, and going backwards, like a crab, or like a heap of crabs: for her alternately expanding and contracting hands might have represented two of that species, and her creeping face, some half a dozen more: crouched on the veinous root of an old tree, pulled out a short black pipe from within the crown of her bonnet, lighted it with a match, and smoked in silence, looking fixedly at her questioner.

Mr. Carker laughed, and turned upon his heel.

"Good!" said the old woman. "One child dead, and one child living: one wife dead, and one wife coming. Go and meet her!"

In spite of himself, the manager looked round again, and stopped. The old woman, who had not removed her pipe, and was munching and mumbling while she smoked, as if in conversation with an invisible familiar, pointed with her finger in the direction he was going, and laughed.

"What was that you said, Beldamite?" he demanded.

The woman mumbled, and chattered, and smoked, and still pointed before him; but remained silent. Muttering a farewell that was not complimentary, Mr. Carker pursued his way; but as he turned out of that place, and looked over his shoulder at the root of the old tree, he could yet see the finger pointing before him, and thought he heard the woman screaming, "Go and meet her!"

Preparations for a choice repast were completed he found, at the hotel; and Mr. Dombey, and the major, and the breakfast, were awaiting the ladies. Individual constitution has much to do with the development of

such facts, no doubt; but in this case, appetite carried it hollow over the tender passion; Mr. Dombey being very cool and collected, and the major fretting and fuming in a state of violent heat and irritation. At length the door was thrown open by the native, and, after a pause, occupied by her languishing along the gallery, a very blooming, but not a very youthful lady appeared.

"My dear Mr. Dombey," said the lady, "I am afraid we are late, but Edith has been out already looking for a favorable point of view for a sketch, and kept me waiting for her. Falsest of majors," giving him her little finger, "how do you?"

"Mrs. Skewton," said Mr. Dombey, "let me gratify my friend Carker:" Mr. Dombey unconsciously emphasized the word friend, as saying "no really; I do allow him to take credit for that distinction;" "by presenting him to you. You have heard me mention Mr. Carker."

"I am charmed, I am sure," said Mrs. Skewton, graciously.

Mr. Carker was charmed, of course. Would he have been more charmed on Mr. Dombey's behalf, if Mrs. Skewton had been (as he at first supposed her) the Edith whom they had toasted overnight?

"Why, where, for Heaven's sake is Edith?" exclaimed Mrs. Skewton, looking round. "Still at the door, giving Withers orders about the mounting of those drawings! My dear Mr. Dombey, will you have the kindness" —

Mr. Dombey was already gone to seek her. Next moment he returned, bearing on his arm the same elegantly dressed and very handsome lady whom Mr. Carker had encountered underneath the trees.

"Carker" — began Mr. Dombey. But their recog-

nition of each other was so manifest, that Mr. Dombey stopped surprised.

"I am obliged to the gentleman," said Edith, with a stately bend, "for sparing me some annoyance from an importunate beggar just now."

"I am obliged to my good fortune," said Mr. Carker, bowing low, "for the opportunity of rendering so slight a service to one whose servant I am proud to be."

As her eye rested on him for an instant, and then lighted on the ground, he saw in its bright and searching glance a suspicion that he had not come up at the moment of his interference, but had secretly observed her sooner. As he saw that, she saw in *his* eye that her distrust was not without foundation.

"Really," cried Mrs. Skewton, who had taken this opportunity of inspecting Mr. Carker through her glass, and satisfying herself (as she lisped audibly to the major) that he was all heart; "really now, this is one of the most enchanting coincidences that I ever heard of. The idea! My dearest Edith, there is such an obvious destiny in it, that really one might almost be induced to cross one's arms upon one's frock, and say, like those wicked Turks, there is no What's-his name but Thingummy, and What-you-may-call-it is his prophet!"

Edith deigned no revision of this extraordinary quotation from the Koran, but Mr. Dombey felt it necessary to offer a few polite remarks.

"It gives me great pleasure," said Mr. Dombey, with cumbrous gallantry, "that a gentleman so nearly connected with myself as Carker is, should have had the honor and happiness of rendering the least assistance to Mrs. Granger." Mr. Dombey bowed to her. "But it gives me some pain, and it occasions me to be really en-

vious of Carker;" he unconsciously laid stress on these words, as sensible that they must appear to involve a very surprising proposition; "envious of Carker, that I had not that honor and that happiness myself." Mr. Dombey bowed again. Edith, saving for a curl of her lip, was motionless.

"By the Lord, sir," cried the major, bursting into speech at sight of the waiter, who was come to announce breakfast, "it's an extraordinary thing to me that no one can have the honor and happiness of shooting all such beggars through the head without being brought to book for it. But here's an arm for Mrs. Granger, if she'll do J. B. the honor to accept it; and the greatest service Joe can render you, ma'am, just now, is, to lead you in to table!"

With this, the major gave his arm to Edith; Mr. Dombey led the way with Mrs. Skewton; Mr. Carker went last, smiling on the party.

"I am quite rejoiced, Mr. Carker," said the lady-mother, at breakfast, after another approving survey of him through her glass, "that you have timed your visit so happily, as to go with us to-day. It is the most enchanting expedition!"

"Any expedition would be enchanting in such society," returned Carker; "but I believe it is, in itself, full of interest."

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Skewton, with a faded little scream of rapture, "the castle is charming! — associations of the middle ages — and all that — which is so truly exquisite. Don't you dote upon the middle ages, Mr. Carker?"

"Very much, indeed," said Mr. Carker.

"Such charming times!" cried Cleopatra. "So full

of faith! So vigorous and forcible! So picturesque! So perfectly removed from commonplace! Oh dear! If they would only leave us a little more of the poetry of existence in these terrible days!"

Mrs. Skewton was looking sharp after Mr. Dombey all the time she said this, who was looking at Edith: who was listening, but who never lifted up her eyes.

"We are dreadfully real, Mr. Carker," said Mrs. Skewton; "are we not?"

Few people had less reason to complain of their reality than Cleopatra, who had as much that was false about her as could well go to the composition of anybody with a real individual existence. But Mr. Carker commiserated our reality nevertheless, and agreed that we were very hardly used in that regard.

"Pictures at the castle, quite divine!" said Cleopatra. "I hope you dote upon pictures?"

"I assure you, Mrs. Skewton," said Mr. Dombey, with solemn encouragement of his manager, "that Carker has a very good taste for pictures; quite a natural power of appreciating them. He is a very creditable artist himself. He will be delighted, I am sure, with Mrs. Granger's taste and skill."

"Damme, sir!" cried Major Bagstock, "my opinion is, that you're the admirable Carker, and can do anything."

"Oh!" smiled Carker, with humility, "you are much too sanguine, Major Bagstock. I can do very little. But Mr. Dombey is so generous in his estimation of any trivial accomplishment a man like myself may find it almost necessary to acquire, and to which, in his very different sphere, he is far superior, that" — Mr. Carker shrugged his shoulders, deprecating further praise, and said no more.

All this time, Edith never raised her eyes, unless to glance towards her mother when that lady's fervent spirit shone forth in words. But as Carker ceased, she looked at Mr. Dombey for a moment. For a moment only; but with a transient gleam of scornful wonder on her face, not lost on one observer, who was smiling round the board.

Mr. Dombey caught the dark eyelash in its descent, and took the opportunity of arresting it.

"You have been to Warwick often, unfortunately?" said Mr. Dombey.

"Several times."

"The visit will be tedious to you, I am afraid."

"Oh no; not at all."

"Ah! You are like your cousin Feenix, my dearest Edith," said Mrs. Skewton. "He has been to Warwick Castle fifty times, if he has been there once; yet if he came to Leamington to-morrow — I wish he would, dear angel! — he would make his fifty-second visit next day."

"We are all enthusiastic, are we not, mama?" said Edith, with a cold smile.

"Too much so, for our peace, perhaps, my dear," returned her mother; "but we won't complain. Our own emotions are our recompense. If, as your cousin Feenix says, the sword wears out the what's-its-name" —

"The scabbard, perhaps," said Edith.

"Exactly — a little too fast, it is because it is bright and glowing, you know, my dearest love."

Mrs. Skewton heaved a gentle sigh, supposed to cast a shadow on the surface of that dagger of lath, whereof her susceptible bosom was the sheath; and leaning her head on one side, in the Cleopatra manner, looked with pensive affection on her darling child.

Edith had turned her face towards Mr. Dombey when he first addressed her, and had remained in that attitude, while speaking to her mother, and while her mother spoke to her, as though offering him her attention, if he had anything more to say. There was something in the manner of this simple courtesy: almost defiant, and giving it the character of being rendered on compulsion, or as a matter of traffic to which she was a reluctant party: again not lost upon that same observer who was smiling round the board. It set him thinking of her as he had first seen her, when she had believed herself to be alone among the trees.

Mr. Dombey having nothing else to say, proposed — the breakfast being now finished, and the major gorged, like any boa constrictor — that they should start. A barouche being in waiting, according to the orders of that gentleman, the two ladies, the major and himself, took their seats in it; the native and the wan page mounted the box, Mr. Towlinson being left behind; and Mr. Carker, on horseback, brought up the rear.

Mr. Carker cantered behind the carriage, at the distance of a hundred yards or so, and watched it, during all the ride, as if he were a cat, indeed, and its four occupants, mice. Whether he looked to one side of the road, or to the other — over distant landscape, with its smooth undulations, wind-mills, corn, grass, bean-fields, wild-flowers, farm-yards, hay-ricks, and the spire among the wood — or upward in the sunny air, where butterflies were sporting round his head, and birds were pouring out their songs — or downward, where the shadows of the branches interlaced, and made a trembling carpet on the road — or onward, where the overhanging trees formed aisles and arches, dim with the softened light that steeped

through leaves — one corner of his eye was ever on the formal head of Mr. Dombey, addressed towards him, and the feather in the bonnet, drooping so neglectfully and scornfully between them: much as he had seen the haughty eyelids droop; not least so, when the face met that now fronting it. Once, and once only, did his wary glance release these objects; and that was, when a leap over a low hedge, and a gallop across a field, enabled him to anticipate the carriage coming by the road, and to be standing ready, at the journey's end, to hand the ladies out. Then, and but then, he met her glance for an instant in her first surprise; but when he touched her, in alighting, with his soft white hand, it overlooked him altogether as before.

Mrs. Skewton was bent on taking charge of Mr. Carker herself, and showing him the beauties of the Castle. She was determined to have his arm, and the major's too. It would do that incorrigible creature: who was the most barbarous infidel in point of poetry: good to be in such company. This chance arrangement left Mr. Dombey at liberty to escort Edith: which he did: stalking before them through the apartments with a gentlemanly solemnity.

"Those darling by-gone times, Mr. Carker," said Cleopatra, "with their delicious fortresses, and their dear old dungeons, and their delightful places of torture, and their romantic vengeances, and their picturesque assaults and sieges, and everything that makes life truly charming! How dreadfully we have degenerated!"

"Yes, we have fallen off deplorably," said Mr. Carker.

The peculiarity of their conversation was, that Mrs. Skewton, in spite of her ecstasies, and Mr. Carker, in spite of his urbanity, were both intent on watching Mr.

Dombey and Edith. With all their conversational endowments, they spoke somewhat distractedly, and at random in consequence.

"We have no faith left, positively," said Mrs. Skewton, advancing her shrivelled ear; for Mr. Dombey was saying something to Edith. "We have no faith in the dear old barons, who were the most delightful creatures — or in the dear old priests, who were the most warlike of men — or even in the days of that inestimable Queen Bess, upon the wall there, which were so extremely golden! Dear creature! She was all heart! And that charming father of hers! I hope you dote on Harry the Eighth!"

"I admire him very much," said Carker.

"So bluff!" cried Mrs. Skewton, "wasn't he? So burly. So truly English. Such a picture, too, he makes, with his dear little peepy eyes, and his benevolent chin!"

"Ah, ma'am!" said Carker, stopping short; "but if you speak of pictures, there's a composition! What gallery in the world can produce the counterpart of that!"

As the smiling gentleman thus spake, he pointed through a door-way to where Mr. Dombey and Edith were standing alone in the centre of another room.

They were not interchanging a word or a look. Standing together, arm in arm, they had the appearance of being more divided than if seas had rolled between them. There was a difference even in the pride of the two, that removed them farther from each other, than if one had been the proudest and the other the humblest specimen of humanity, in all creation. He, self-important, unbending, formal, austere. She, lovely and graceful in

an uncommon degree, but totally regardless of herself and him and everything around, and spurning her own attractions with her haughty brow and lip, as if they were a badge or livery she hated. So unmatched were they, and opposed, so forced and linked together by a chain which adverse hazard and mischance had forged: that fancy might have imagined the pictures on the walls around them, startled by the unnatural conjunction, and observant of it in their several expressions. Grim knights and warriors looked scowling on them. A churchman, with his hand upraised, denounced the mockery of such a couple coming to God's altar. Quiet waters in landscapes, with the sun reflected in their depths, asked, if better means of escape were not at hand, was there no drowning left? Ruins cried, "Look here, and see what We are, wedded to uncongenial Time!" Animals, opposed by nature, worried one another, as a moral to them. Loves and Cupids took to flight afraid, and Martyrdom had no such torment in its painted history of suffering.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Skewton was so charmed by the sight to which Mr. Carker invoked her attention, that she could not refrain from saying, half aloud, how sweet, how very full of soul it was! Edith, overhearing, looked round, and flushed indignant scarlet to her hair.

"My dearest Edith knows I was admiring her!" said Cleopatra, tapping her, almost timidly, on the back with her parasol. "Sweet pet!"

Again Mr. Carker saw the strife he had witnessed so unexpectedly among the trees. Again he saw the haughty languor and indifference come over it, and hide it like a cloud.

She did not raise her eyes to him; but with a slight peremptory motion of them, seemed to bid her mother come near. Mrs. Skewton thought it expedient to understand the hint, and advancing quickly, with her two cavaliers, kept near her daughter from that time.

Mr. Carker now, having nothing to distract his attention, began to discourse upon the pictures, and to select the best, and point them out to Mr. Dombey: speaking with his usual familiar recognition of Mr. Dombey's greatness, and rendering homage by adjusting his eyeglass for him, or finding out the right place in his catalogue, or holding his stick, or the like. These services did not so much originate with Mr. Carker, in truth, as with Mr. Dombey himself, who was apt to assert his chieftainship by saying, with subdued authority, and in an easy way — for him — "Here, Carker, have the goodness to assist me, will you!" which the smiling gentleman always did with pleasure.

They made the tour of the pictures, the walls, crow's nest, and so forth; and as they were still one little party, and the major was rather in the shade, being sleepy during the process of digestion, Mr. Carker became communicative and agreeable. At first, he addressed himself for the most part to Mrs. Skewton; but as that sensitive lady was in such ecstasies with the works of art, after the first quarter of an hour, that she could do nothing but yawn (they were such perfect inspirations, she observed as a reason for that mark of rapture), he transferred his attentions to Mr. Dombey. Mr. Dombey said little beyond an occasional "Very true, Carker," or "Indeed, Carker?" but he tacitly encouraged Carker to proceed, and inwardly approved of his behavior very much: deeming it as well that somebody should talk,

and thinking that his remarks, which were, as one might say, a branch of the parent establishment, might amuse Mrs. Granger. Mr. Carker, who possessed an excellent discretion, never took the liberty of addressing that lady, direct; but she seemed to listen, though she never looked at him; and once or twice, when he was emphatic in his peculiar humility, the twilight smile stole over her face, not as a light, but as a deep black shadow.

Warwick Castle being at length pretty well exhausted, and the major very much so: to say nothing of Mrs. Skewton, whose peculiar demonstrations of delight had become very frequent indeed: the carriage was again put in requisition, and they rode to several admired points of view in the neighborhood. Mr. Dombey ceremoniously observed of one of these, that a sketch, however slight, from the fair hand of Mrs. Granger, would be a remembrance to him of that agreeable day: though he wanted no artificial remembrance, he was sure (here Mr. Dombey made another of his bows), which he must always highly value. Withers the lean having Edith's sketch-book under his arm, was immediately called upon by Mrs. Skewton to produce the same: and the carriage stopped, that Edith might make the drawing, which Mr. Dombey was to put away among his treasures.

"But I am afraid I trouble you too much," said Mr. Dombey.

"By no means. Where would you wish it taken from?" she answered, turning to him with the same enforced attention as before.

Mr. Dombey, with another bow, which cracked the starch in his cravat, would beg to leave that to the artist.

"I would rather you choose for yourself," said Edith.

"Suppose then," said Mr. Dombey, "we say from here. It appears a good spot for the purpose, or — Carker, what do *you* think?"

There happened to be in the foreground, at some little distance, a grove of trees, not unlike that in which Mr. Carker had made his chain of footsteps in the morning, and with a seat under one tree, generally resembling, in the general character of its situation, the point where his chain had broken.

"Might I venture to suggest to Mrs. Granger?" said Carker, "that that is an interesting — almost a curious — point of view?"

She followed the direction of his riding-whip with her eyes, and raised them quickly to his face. It was the second glance they had exchanged since their introduction; and would have been exactly like the first, but that its expression was plainer.

"Would you like that?" said Edith to Mr. Dombey.

"I shall be charmed," said Mr. Dombey to Edith.

Therefore the carriage was driven to the spot where Mr. Dombey was to be charmed; and Edith, without moving from her seat, and opening her sketch-book with her usual proud indifference, began to sketch.

"My pencils are all pointless," she said, stopping and turning them over.

"Pray allow me," said Mr. Dombey. "Or Carker will do it better, as he understands these things. Carker have the goodness to see to these pencils for Mrs. Granger."

Mr. Carker rode up close to the carriage-door on Mrs. Granger's side, and letting the rein fall on his horse's neck, took the pencils from her hand with a

smile and a bow, and sat in the saddle leisurely mending them. Having done so he begged to be allowed to hold them, and to hand them to her as they were required; and thus Mr. Carker, with many commendations of Mrs. Granger's extraordinary skill — especially in trees — remained close at her side, looking over the drawing as she made it. Mr. Dombey in the mean time stood bolt upright in the carriage like a highly respectable ghost, looking on too; while Cleopatra and the major dallied as two ancient doves might do.

"Are you satisfied with that, or shall I finish it a little more?" said Edith, showing the sketch to Mr. Dombey.

Mr. Dombey begged that it might not be touched; it was perfection.

"It is most extraordinary," said Carker, bringing every one of his red gums to bear upon his praise. "I was not prepared for anything so beautiful, and so unusual altogether."

This might have applied to the sketcher no less than to the sketch; but Mr. Carker's manner was openness itself — not as to his mouth alone, but as to his whole spirit. So it continued to be while the drawing was laid aside for Mr. Dombey, and while the sketching materials were put up; then he handed in the pencils (which were received with a distant acknowledgment of his help, but without a look), and tightening his rein, fell back, and followed the carriage again.

Thinking, perhaps, as he rode, that even this trivial sketch had been made and delivered to its owner, as if it had been bargained for and bought. Thinking, perhaps, that although she had assented with such perfect readiness to his request, her haughty face, bent over the

drawing, or glancing at the distant objects represented in it, had been the face of a proud woman, engaged in a sordid and miserable transaction. Thinking, perhaps, of such things: but smiling certainly, and while he seemed to look about him freely, in enjoyment of the air and exercise, keeping always that sharp corner of his eye upon the carriage.

A stroll among the haunted ruins of Kenilworth, and more rides to more points of view: most of which, Mrs. Skewton reminded Mr. Dombey, Edith had already sketched, as he had seen in looking over her drawings: brought the day's expedition to a close. Mrs. Skewton and Edith were driven to their own lodgings; Mr. Carker was graciously invited by Cleopatra to return thither with Mr. Dombey and the major, in the evening, to hear some of Edith's music; and the three gentlemen repaired to their hotel to dinner.

The dinner was the counterpart of yesterday's, except that the major was twenty-four hours more triumphant and less mysterious. Edith was toasted again. Mr. Dombey was again agreeably embarrassed. And Mr. Carker was full of interest and praise.

There were no other visitors at Mrs. Skewton's. Edith's drawings were strewn about the room, a little more abundantly than usual perhaps; and Withers, the wan page, handed round a little stronger tea. The harp was there; the piano was there; and Edith sang and played. But even the music was paid by Edith to Mr. Dombey's order, as it were, in the same uncompromising way. As thus.

"Edith, my dearest love," said Mrs. Skewton, half an hour after tea, "Mr. Dombey is dying to hear you, I know."

"Mr. Dombey has life enough left to say so for himself, mama, I have no doubt."

"I shall be immensely obliged," said Mr. Dombey.

"What do you wish?"

"Piano?" hesitated Mr. Dombey.

"Whatever you please. You have only to choose."

Accordingly, she began with the piano. It was the same with the harp; the same with her singing; the same with the selection of the pieces that she sang and played. Such frigid and constrained, yet prompt and pointed acquiescence with the wishes he imposed upon her, and on no one else, was sufficiently remarkable to penetrate through all the mysteries of picquet, and impress itself on Mr. Carker's keen attention. Nor did he lose sight of the fact that Mr. Dombey was evidently proud of his power, and liked to show it.

Nevertheless, Mr. Carker played so well — some games with the major, and some with Cleopatra, whose vigilance of eye in respect of Mr. Dombey and Edith no lynx could have surpassed — that he even heightened his position in the lady-mother's good graces; and when on taking leave he regretted that he would be obliged to return to London next morning, Cleopatra trusted: community of feeling not being met with every day: that it was far from being the last time they would meet.

"I hope so," said Mr. Carker, with an expressive look at the couple in the distance, as he drew towards the door, following the major. "I think so."

Mr. Dombey, who had taken a stately leave of Edith, bent, or made some approach to a bend, over Cleopatra's couch, and said, in a low voice:

"I have requested Mrs. Granger's permission to call

on her to-morrow morning — for a purpose — and she has appointed twelve o'clock. May I hope to have the pleasure of finding you at home, madam, afterwards?"

Cleopatra was so much fluttered and moved, by hearing this, of course incomprehensible speech, that she could only shut her eyes, and shake her head, and give Mr. Dombey her hand; which Mr. Dombey, not exactly knowing what to do with, dropped.

"Dombey, come along!" cried the major looking in at the door. "Damme, sir, old Joe has a great mind to propose an alteration in the name of the Royal Hotel, and that it should be called the Three Jolly Bachelors, in honor of ourselves and Carker." With this the major slapped Mr. Dombey on the back, and winking over his shoulder at the ladies, with a frightful tendency of blood to the head, carried him off.

Mrs. Skewton reposed on her sofa, and Edith sat apart, by her harp, in silence. The mother, trifling with her fan, looked stealthily at the daughter more than once, but the daughter, brooding gloomily with downcast eyes, was not to be disturbed.

Thus they remained for a long hour, without a word, until Mrs. Skewton's maid appeared, according to custom, to prepare her gradually for night. At night, she should have been a skeleton, with dart and hour-glass, rather than a woman, this attendant; for her touch was as the touch of Death. The painted object shrivelled underneath her hand; the form collapsed, the hair dropped off, the arched dark eyebrows changed to scanty tufts of gray; the pale lips shrunk, the skin became cadaverous and loose; and old, worn, yellow nodding woman, with red eyes, alone remained in Cleopatra's

place, huddled up, like a slovenly bundle, in a greasy flannel gown.

The very voice was changed, as it addressed Edith, when they were alone again.

"Why don't you tell me," it said, sharply, "that he is coming here to-morrow by appointment?"

"Because you know it," returned Edith, "mother."

The mocking emphasis she laid on that one word!

"You know he has bought me," she resumed. "Or that he will, to-morrow. He has considered of his bargain; he has shown it to his friend; he is even rather proud of it; he thinks that it will suit him, and may be had sufficiently cheap; and he will buy to-morrow. God, that I have lived for this, and that I feel it!"

Compress into one handsome face the conscious self-abasement, and the burning indignation of a hundred women, strong in passion and in pride; and there it hid itself with two white shuddering arms.

"What do you mean?" returned the angry mother. "Haven't you from a child"—

"A child!" said Edith, looking at her, "when was I a child! What childhood did you ever leave to me? I was a woman — artful, designing, mercenary, laying snares for men — before I knew myself, or you, or even understood the base and wretched aim of every new display I learnt. You gave birth to a woman. Look upon her. She is in her pride to-night."

And as she spoke, she struck her hand upon her beautiful bosom, as though she would have beaten down herself.

"Look at me," she said, "who have never known what it is to have an honest heart, and love. Look at me, taught to scheme and plot when children play, and

married in my youth — an old age of design — to one for whom I had no feeling but indifference. Look at me, whom he left a widow, dying before his inheritance descended to him — a judgment on you! well deserved! — and tell me what has been my life for ten years since."

"We have been making every effort to endeavor to secure to you a good establishment," rejoined her mother. "That has been your life. And now you have got it."

"There is no slave in a market, there is no horse in a fair, so shown and offered and examined and paraded, mother, as I have been, for ten shameful years," cried Edith, with a burning brow, and the same bitter emphasis on the one word. "Is it not so? Have I been made the by-word of all kinds of men? Have fools, have profligates, have boys, have dotards, dangled after me, and one by one rejected me, and fallen off, because you were too plain with all your cunning — yes, and too true, with all those false pretences — until we have almost come to be notorious? The license of look and touch," she said, with flashing eyes, "have I submitted to it, in half the places of resort upon the map of England? Have I been hawked and vended here and there, until the last grain of self-respect is dead within me, and I loathe myself? Has *this* been my late childhood? I had none before. Do not tell me that I had, to-night, of all nights in my life!"

"You might have been well married," said her mother, "twenty times at least, Edith, if you had given encouragement enough."

"No! Who takes me, refuse that I am, and as I well deserve to be," she answered, raising her head, and trembling in her energy of shame and stormy pride,

"shall take me, as this man does, with no art of mine put forth to lure him. He sees me at the auction, and he thinks it well to buy me. Let him! When he came to view me — perhaps to bid — he required to see the roll of my accomplishments. I gave it to him. When he would have me show one of them, to justify his purchase to his men, I require of him to say which he demands, and I exhibit it. I will do no more. He makes the purchase of his own will, and with his own sense of its worth, and the power of his money; and I hope it may never disappoint him. *I* have not vaunted and pressed the bargain; neither have you, so far as I have been able to prevent you."

"You talk strangely to-night, Edith, to your own mother."

"It seems so to me; stranger to me than you," said Edith. "But my education was completed long ago. I am too old now, and have fallen too low, by degrees, to take a new course, and to stop yours, and to help myself. The germ of all that purifies a woman's breast, and makes it true and good, has never stirred in mine, and I have nothing else to sustain me when I despise myself." There had been a touching sadness in her voice, but it was gone, when she went on to say, "So, as we are genteel and poor, I am content that we should be made rich by these means; all I say is, I have kept the only purpose I have had the strength to form — I had almost said the power, with you at my side, mother — and have not tempted this man on."

"This man! You speak," said her mother, "as if you hated him."

"And you thought I loved him, did you not?" she answered, stopping on her way across the room, and

looking round. "Shall I tell you," she continued, with her eyes fixed on her mother, "who already knows us thoroughly, and reads us right, and before whom I have even less of self-respect or confidence than before my own inward self: being so much degraded by his knowledge of me?"

"This is an attack, I suppose," returned her mother, coldly, "on poor, unfortunate what's-his-name — Mr. Carker! Your want of self-respect and confidence, my dear, in reference to that person (who is very agreeable, it strikes me), is not likely to have much effect on your establishment. Why do you look at me so hard? Are you ill?"

Edith suddenly let fall her face, as if it had been stung, and while she pressed her hands upon it, a terrible tremble crept over her whole frame. It was quickly gone; and with her usual step she passed out of the room.

The maid, who should have been a skeleton, then reappeared, and giving one arm to her mistress, who appeared to have taken off her manner with her charms, and to have put on paralysis with her flannel gown, collected the ashes of Cleopatra, and carried them away, ready for to-morrow's revivification.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ALTERATIONS.

"So the day has come at length, Susan," said Florence to the excellent Nipper, "when we are going back to our quiet home!"

Susan drew in her breath with an amount of expression not easily described, and further relieving her feelings with a smart cough, answered, "Very quiet indeed, Miss Floy, no doubt. Excessive so."

"When I was a child," said Florence, thoughtfully, and after musing for some moments, "did you ever see that gentleman who has taken the trouble to ride down here to speak to me, now three times — three times I think, Susan?"

"Three times, miss," returned the Nipper. "Once when you was out a-walking with them Sket" —

Florence gently looked at her, and Miss Nipper checked herself.

"With Sir Barnet and his lady, I mean to say, miss, and the young gentleman. And two evenings since then."

"When I was a child, and when company used to come to visit papa, did you ever see that gentleman at home, Susan?" asked Florence.

"Well, miss," returned her maid, after considering, "I really couldn't say I ever did. When your poor

dear ma died, Miss Floy, I was very new in the family, you see, and *my* element:" the Nipper bridled, as opining that her merits had been always designedly extinguished by Mr. Dombey: "was the floor below the attics."

"To be sure," said Florence, still thoughtfully; "you are not likely to have known who came to the house. I quite forgot."

"Not, miss, but what we talked about the family and visitors," said Susan, "and but what I heard much said, although the nurse before Mrs. Richards *did* make unpleasant remarks when I was in company, and hint at little Pitchers, but that could only be attributed, poor thing," observed Susan with composed forbearance, "to habits of intoxication, for which she was required to leave, and did."

Florence, who was seated at her chamber-window, with her face resting on her hand, sat looking out, and hardly seemed to hear what Susan said, she was so lost in thought.

"At all events, miss," said Susan, "I remember very well that this same gentleman, Mr. Carker, was almost, if not quite, as great a gentleman with your papa then, as he is now. It used to be said in the house then, miss, that he was at the head of all your pa's affairs in the city, and managed the whole, and that your pa minded him more than anybody, which, begging your pardon, Miss Floy, he might easy do, for he never minded anybody else. I knew that, Pitcher as I might have been."

Susan Nipper, with an injured remembrance of the nurse before Mrs. Richards, emphasized "Pitcher" strongly.

"And that Mr. Carker has not fallen off, miss," she pursued, "but has stood his ground, and kept his credit with your pa, I know from what is always said among our people by that Perch, whenever he comes to the house, and though he's the weakest weed in the world, Miss Floy, and no one can have a moment's patience with the man, he knows what goes on in the City tolerable well, and says that your pa does nothing without Mr. Carker, and leaves all to Mr. Carker, and acts according to Mr. Carker, and has Mr. Carker always at his elbow, and I do believe that he believes (that washiest of Perches) that after your pa, the Emperor of India is the child unborn to Mr. Carker."

Not a word of this was lost on Florence, who, with an awakened interest in Susan's speech, no longer gazed abstractedly on the prospect without, but looked at her, and listened with attention.

"Yes, Susan," she said, when that young lady had concluded. "He is in papa's confidence, and is his friend, I am sure."

Florence's mind ran high on this theme, and had done for some days. Mr. Carker, in the two visits with which he had followed up his first one, had assumed a confidence between himself and her — a right on his part to be mysterious and stealthy, in telling her that the ship was still unheard of — a kind of mildly restrained power, and authority over her — that made her wonder, and caused her great uneasiness. She had no means of repelling it, or of freeing herself from the web he was gradually winding about her; for that would have required some art and knowledge of the world, opposed to such address as his; and Florence had none. True, he had said no more to her than that there was no

news of the ship, and that he feared the worst; but how he came to know that she was interested in the ship, and why he had the right to signify his knowledge to her, so insidiously and darkly, troubled Florence very much.

This conduct on the part of Mr. Carker, and her habit of often considering it with wonder and uneasiness, began to invest him with an uncomfortable fascination in Florence's thoughts. A more distinct remembrance of his features, voice, and manner: which she sometimes courted, as a means of reducing him to the level of a real personage, capable of exerting no greater charm over her than another: did not remove the vague impression. And yet he never frowned, or looked upon her with an air of dislike or animosity, but was always smiling and serene.

Again, Florence, in pursuit of her strong purpose with reference to her father, and her steady resolution to believe that she was herself unwittingly to blame for their so cold and distant relations, would recall to mind that this gentleman was his confidential friend, and would think, with an anxious heart, could her struggling tendency to dislike and fear him be a part of that misfortune in her, which had turned her father's love adrift, and left her so alone? She dreaded that it might be; sometimes believed it was: then she resolved that she would try to conquer this wrong feeling; persuaded herself that she was honored and encouraged by the notice of her father's friend! and hoped that patient observation of him and trust in him would lead her bleeding feet along that stony road which ended in her father's heart.

Thus, with no one to advise her — for she could ad-

vise with no one without seeming to complain against him — gentle Florence tossed on an uneasy sea of doubt and hope; and Mr. Carker, like a scaly monster of the deep, swam down below, and kept his shining eye upon her.

Florence had a new reason in all this for wishing to be at home again. Her lonely life was better suited to her course of timid hope and doubt: and she feared sometimes, that in her absence she might miss some hopeful chance of testifying her affection for her father. Heaven knows, she might have set her mind at rest, poor child! on this last point; but her slighted love was fluttering within her, and, even in her sleep, it flew away in dreams, and nestled, like a wandering bird come home, upon her father's neck.

Of Walter she thought often. Ah! how often, when the night was gloomy, and the wind was blowing round the house! But hope was strong in her breast. It is so difficult for the young and ardent, even with such experience as hers, to imagine youth and ardor quenched like a weak flame, and the bright day of life merging into night, at noon, that hope was strong yet. Her tears fell frequently for Walter's sufferings, but rarely for his supposed death, and never long.

She had written to the old Instrument-maker, but had received no answer to her note: which indeed required none. Thus matters stood with Florence on the morning when she was going home, gladly, to her old secluded life.

Doctor and Mrs. Blimber, accompanied (much against his will) by their valued charge, Master Barnet, were already gone back to Brighton, where that young gentleman and his fellow pilgrims to Parnassus were then,

no doubt, in the continual resumption of their studies. The holiday time was past and over; most of the juvenile guests at the villa had taken their departure; and Florence's long visit was come to an end.

There was one guest, however, albeit not resident within the house, who had been very constant in his attention to the family, and who still remained devoted to them. This was Mr. Toots, who after renewing, some weeks ago, the acquaintance he had had the happiness of forming with Skettles Junior, on the night when he burst the Blimberian bonds and soared into freedom with his ring on, called regularly every other day, and left a perfect pack of cards at the hall-door; so many indeed, that the ceremony was quite a deal on the part of Mr. Toots, and a hand at whist on the part of the servant.

Mr. Toots, likewise, with the bold and happy idea of preventing the family from forgetting him (but there is reason to suppose that this expedient originated in the teeming brain of the Chicken), had established a six-oared cutter, manned by aquatic friends of the Chicken's and steered by that illustrious character in person, who wore a bright red fireman's coat for the purpose, and concealed the perpetual black eye with which he was afflicted, beneath a green shade. Previous to the institution of this equipage, Mr. Toots sounded the Chicken on a hypothetical case, as, supposing the Chicken to be enamored of a young lady named Mary, and to have conceived the intention of starting a boat of his own, what would he call that boat? The Chicken replied, with divers strong asseverations, that he would either christen it Poll or the Chicken's Delight. Improving on this idea, Mr. Toots, after deep study and the exer-

cise of much invention, resolved to call his boat The Toots's Joy, as a delicate compliment to Florence, of which no man knowing the parties, could possibly miss the appreciation.

Stretched on a crimsoned cushion in his gallant bark, with his shoes in the air, Mr. Toots, in the exercise of his project, had come up the river, day after day, and week after week, and had flitted to and fro, near Sir Barnet's garden, and had caused his crew to cut across and across the river at sharp angles, for his better exhibition to any lookers-out from Sir Barnet's windows, and had had such evolutions performed by the Toots's Delight as had filled all the neighboring part of the water-side with astonishment. But whenever he saw any one in Sir Barnet's garden on the brink of the river, Mr. Toots always feigned to be passing there, by a combination of coincidences of the most singular and unlikely description.

"How are you, Toots!" Sir Barnet would say, waving his hand from the lawn, while the artful Chicken steered close in shore.

"How de do, Sir Barnet!" Mr. Toots would answer. "What a surprising thing that I should see *you* here?"

Mr. Toots, in his sagacity, always said this, as if, instead of that being Sir Barnet's house, it were some deserted edifice on the banks of the Nile, or Ganges.

"I never was so surprised!" Mr. Toots would exclaim. — "Is Miss Dombey there?"

Whereupon Florence would appear, perhaps.

"Oh, Diogenes is quite well, Miss Dombey," Mr. Toots would cry. "I called to ask this morning."

"Thank you very much!" the pleasant voice of Florence would reply.

"Won't you come ashore, Toots?" Sir Barnet would

say then. "Come! you're in no hurry. Come and see us."

"Oh it's of no consequence, thank you!" Mr. Toots would blushingly rejoin. "I thought Miss Dombey might like to know, that's all. Good-by!" And poor Mr. Toots, who was dying to accept the invitation, but hadn't the courage to do it, signed to the Chicken, with an aching heart, and away went the Delight, cleaving the water like an arrow.

The Delight was lying in a state of extraordinary splendor, at the garden-steps, on the morning of Florence's departure. When she went down-stairs to take leave, after her talk with Susan, she found Mr. Toots awaiting her in the drawing-room.

"Oh, how de do, Miss Dombey?" said the stricken Toots, always dreadfully disconcerted when the desire of his heart was gained, and he was speaking to her; "thank you, I'm very well indeed, I hope you're the same, so was Diogenes yesterday."

"You are very kind," said Florence.

"Thank you, it's of no consequence," retorted Mr. Toots. "I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind, in this fine weather, coming home by water, Miss Dombey. There's plenty of room in the boat for your maid."

"I am very much obliged to you," said Florence, hesitating. "I really am — but I would rather not."

"Oh, it's of no consequence," retorted Mr. Toots. "Good-morning!"

"Won't you wait and see Lady Skettles?" asked Florence, kindly.

"Oh no, thank you," returned Mr. Toots, "it's of no consequence at all."

So shy was Mr. Toots on such occasions, and so flur-

ried! But Lady Skettles entering at the moment, Mr. Toots was suddenly seized with a passion for asking her how she did, and hoping she was very well; nor could Mr. Toots by any possibility leave off shaking hands with her, until Sir Barnet appeared: to whom he immediately clung with the tenacity of desperation.

"We are losing, to-day, Toots," said Sir Barnet, turning towards Florence, "the light of our house, I assure you."

"Oh, it's of no conseq — I mean yes, to be sure," faltered the embarrassed Toots. "Good-morning!"

Notwithstanding the emphatic nature of this farewell, Mr. Toots, instead of going away, stood leering about him, vacantly. Florence, to relieve him, bade adieu, with many thanks, to Lady Skettles, and gave her arm to Sir Barnet.

"May I beg of you, my dear Miss Dombey," said her host, as he conducted her to the carriage, "to present my best compliments to your dear papa?"

It was distressing to Florence to receive the commission, for she felt as if she were imposing on Sir Barnet, by allowing him to believe that a kindness rendered to her, was rendered to her father. As she could not explain, however, she bowed her head and thanked him; and again she thought that the dull home, free from such embarrassments, and such reminders of her sorrow, was her natural and best retreat.

Such of her late friends and companions as were yet remaining at the villa, came running from within, and from the garden, to say good-by. They were all attached to her, and very earnest in taking leave of her. Even the household were sorry for her going, and the servants came nodding and courtesying round the carriage-

door. As Florence looked round on the kind faces, and saw among them those of Sir Barnet and his lady, and of Mr. Toots, who was chuckling and staring at her from a distance, she was reminded of the night when Paul and she had come from Doctor Blimber's: and when the carriage drove away, her face was wet with tears.

Sorrowful tears, but tears of consolation, too; for all the softer memories connected with the dull old house to which she was returning made it dear to her, as they rose up. How long it seemed since she had wandered through the silent rooms: since she had last crept, softly and afraid, into those her father occupied: since she had felt the solemn but yet soothing influence of the beloved dead in every action of her daily life! This new farewell reminded her, besides, of her parting with poor Walter: of his looks and words that night: and of the gracious blending she had noticed in him, of tenderness for those he left behind, with courage and high spirit. His little history was associated with the old house too, and gave it a new claim and hold upon her heart.

Even Susan Nipper softened towards the home of so many years, as they were on their way towards it. Gloomy as it was, and rigid justice as she rendered to its gloom, she forgave it a great deal. "I shall be glad to see it again, I don't deny, miss," said the Nipper. "There a'n't much in it to boast of, but I wouldn't have it burnt or pulled down, neither!"

"You'll be glad to go through the old rooms, won't you, Susan?" said Florence, smiling.

"Well, miss," returned the Nipper, softening more and more towards the house, as they approached it

nearer, "I won't deny but what I shall, though I shall hate 'em again, to-morrow, very likely."

Florence felt that, for her, there was greater peace within it than elsewhere. It was better and easier to keep her secret shut up there, among the tall dark walls, than to carry it abroad into the light, and try to hide it from a crowd of happy eyes. It was better to pursue the study of her loving heart, alone, and find no new discouragements in loving hearts about her. It was easier to hope, and pray, and love on, all uncared for, yet with constancy and patience, in the tranquil sanctuary of such remembrances: although it mouldered, rusted, and decayed about her: than in a new scene, let its gayety be what it would. She welcomed back her old enchanted dream of life, and longed for the old dark door to close upon her, once again.

Full of such thoughts, they turned into the long and sombre street. Florence was not on that side of the carriage which was nearest to her home, and as the distance lessened between them and it, she looked out of her window for the children over the way.

She was thus engaged, when an exclamation from Susan caused her to turn quickly round.

"Why gracious me!" cried Susan, breathless, "where's our house!"

"Our house!" said Florence.

Susan, drawing in her head from the window, thrust it out again, drew it in again as the carriage stopped, and stared at her mistress in amazement.

There was a labyrinth of scaffolding raised all round the house, from the basement to the roof. Loads of bricks and stones, and heaps of mortar, and piles of wood, blocked up half the width and length of the broad

street at the side. Ladders were raised against the walls: laborers were climbing up and down; men were at work upon the steps of the scaffolding; painters and decorators were busy inside; great rolls of ornamental paper were being delivered from a cart at the door; an upholsterer's wagon also stopped the way; no furniture was to be seen through the gaping and broken windows in any of the rooms; nothing but workmen, and the implements of their several trades, swarming from the kitchens to the garrets. Inside and outside alike: bricklayers, painters, carpenters, masons: hammer, hod, brush, pickaxe, saw, and trowel: all at work together, in full chorus!

Florence descended from the coach, half doubting if it were, or could be the right house, until she recognized Towlinson, with a sun-burnt face, standing at the door to receive her.

"There is nothing the matter?" inquired Florence.

"Oh, no, miss."

"There are great alterations going on."

"Yes, miss, great alterations," said Towlinson.

Florence passed him as if she were in a dream, and hurried up-stairs. The garish light was in the long-darkened drawing-room, and there were steps and platforms, and men in paper caps, in the high places. Her mother's picture was gone with the rest of the movables, and on the mark where it had been, was scrawled in chalk, "this room in panel. Green and gold." The staircase was a labyrinth of posts and planks like the outside of the house, and a whole Olympus of plumbers and glaziers was reclining in various attitudes, on the skylight. Her own room was not yet touched within, but there were beams and boards raised against it with-

out, balking the daylight. She went up swiftly to that other bedroom, where the little bed was; and a dark giant of a man with a pipe in his mouth, and his head tied up in a pocket-handkerchief, was staring in at the window.

It was here that Susan Nipper, who had been in quest of Florence, found her, and said, would she go downstairs to her papa, who wished to speak to her.

"At home! and wishing to speak to me!" cried Florence, trembling.

Susan, who was infinitely more distraught than Florence herself, repeated her errand; and Florence, pale and agitated, hurried down again, without a moment's hesitation. She thought upon the way down, would she dare to kiss him? The longing of her heart resolved her, and she thought she would.

Her father might have heard that heart beat, when it came into his presence. One instant, and it would have beat against his breast —

But he was not alone. There were two ladies there; and Florence stopped. Striving so hard with her emotion, that if her brute friend Di had not burst in and overwhelmed her with his caresses as a welcome home — at which one of the ladies gave a little scream, and that diverted her attention from herself — she would have swooned upon the floor.

"Florence," said her father, putting out his hand: so stiffly that it held her off: "how do you do?"

Florence took the hand between her own, and putting it timidly to her lips, yielded to its withdrawal. It touched the door in shutting it, with quite as much endearment as it had touched her.

"What dog is that?" said Mr. Dombey, displeased.

"It is a dog, papa — from Brighton."

"Well!" said Mr. Dombey; and a cloud passed over his face, for he understood her.

"He is very good-tempered," said Florence, addressing herself with her natural grace and sweetness to the two lady strangers. "He is only glad to see me. Pray forgive him."

She saw in the glance they interchanged, that the lady who had screamed, and who was seated, was old; and that the other lady, who stood near her papa, was very beautiful, and of an elegant figure.

"Mrs. Skewton," said her father, turning to the first, and holding out his hand, "this is my daughter Florence."

"Charming, I am sure," observed the lady, putting up her glass. "So natural! My darling Florence, you must kiss me, if you please."

Florence having done so, turned towards the other lady, by whom her father stood waiting.

"Edith," said Mr. Dombey, "this is my daughter Florence. Florence, this lady will soon be your mama."

Florence started, and looked up at the beautiful face in a conflict of emotions, among which the tears that name awakened, struggled for a moment with surprise, interest, admiration, and an indefinable sort of fear. Then she cried out, "Oh, papa, may you be happy! may you be very, very happy all your life!" and then fell weeping on the lady's bosom.

There was a short silence. The beautiful lady, who at first had seemed to hesitate whether or no she should advance to Florence, held her to her breast, and pressed the hand with which she clasped her, close about her waist, as if to reassure her and comfort her. Not one

word passed the lady's lips. She bent her head down over Florence, and she kissed her on the cheek, but she said no word.

"Shall we go on through the rooms," said Mr. Dombey, "and see how our workmen are doing? Pray allow me, my dear madam."

He said this in offering his arm to Mrs. Skewton, who had been looking at Florence through her glass, as though picturing to herself what she might be made, by the infusion — from her own copious storehouse, no doubt — of a little more Heart and Nature. Florence was still sobbing on the lady's breast, and holding to her, when Mr. Dombey was heard to say from the conservatory:

"Let us ask Edith. Dear me, where is she?"

"Edith, my dear!" cried Mrs. Skewton, "where are you? Looking for Mr. Dombey somewhere, I know. We are here, my love."

The beautiful lady released her hold of Florence, and pressing her lips once more upon her face, withdrew hurriedly, and joined them. Florence remained standing in the same place: happy, sorry, joyful, and in tears, she knew not how or how long, but all at once: when her new mama came back, and took her in her arms again.

"Florence," said the lady hurriedly, and looking into her face with great earnestness. "You will not begin by hating me?"

"By hating you, mama!" cried Florence, winding her arm round her neck, and returning the look.

"Hush! Begin by thinking well of me," said the beautiful lady. "Begin by believing that I will try to make you happy, and that I am prepared to love you, Flor-

ence. Good-by. We shall meet again, soon. Good-by! Don't stay here, now."

Again she pressed her to her breast — she had spoken in a rapid manner, but firmly — and Florence saw her rejoin them in the other room.

And now Florence began to hope that she would learn from her new and beautiful mama, how to gain her father's love; and in her sleep that night, in her lost old home, her own mama smiled radiantly upon the hope, and blessed it. Dreaming Florence!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE OPENING OF THE EYES OF MRS. CHICK.

Miss Tox, all unconscious of any such rare appearances in connection with Mr. Dombey's house, as scaffoldings and ladders, and men with their heads tied up in pocket-handkerchiefs, glaring in at the windows like flying genii or strange birds, — having breakfasted one morning at about this eventful period of time, on her customary viands: to wit, one French roll rasped, one egg new laid (or warranted to be), and one little pot of tea, wherein was infused one little silver scoop-full of that herb on behalf of Miss Tox, and one little silver scoop-full on behalf of the teapot — a flight of fancy in which good house-keepers delight; went up-stairs to set forth the bird waltz on the harpsichord, to water and arrange the plants, to dust the knick-knacks, and according to her daily custom, to make her little drawing-room the garland of Princess's-place.

Miss Tox endued herself with the pair of ancient gloves, like dead leaves, in which she was accustomed to perform these avocations — hidden from human sight at other times in a table-drawer — and went methodically to work; beginning with the bird waltz; passing, by a natural association of ideas, to her bird — a very high-shouldered canary, stricken in years, and much rumpled, but a piercing singer, as Princess's-place well knew;

taking, next in order, the little china ornaments, paper fly-cages, and so forth; and coming round, in good time, to the plants, which generally required to be snipped here and there with a pair of scissors, for some botanical reason that was very powerful with Miss Tox.

Miss Tox was slow in coming to the plants, this morning. The weather was warm, the wind southerly; and there was a sigh of the summer time in Princess's-place, that turned Miss Tox's thoughts upon the country. The pot-boy attached to the Princess's Arms had come out with a can and trickled water, in a flowing pattern, all over Princess's-place, and it gave the weedy ground a fresh scent — quite a growing scent, Miss Tox said. There was a tiny blink of sun peeping in from the great street round the corner, and the smoky sparrows hopped over it and back again, brightening as they passed: or bathed in it like a stream, and became glorified sparrows, unconnected with chimneys. Legends in praise of Ginger Beer, with pictorial representations of thirsty customers submerged in the effervescence, or stunned by the flying corks, were conspicuous in the window of the Princess's Arms. They were making late hay, somewhere out of town; and though the fragrance had a long way to come, and many counter fragrances to contend with among the dwellings of the poor (may God reward the worthy gentlemen who stickle for the plague as part and parcel of the wisdom of our ancestors, and who do their little best to keep those dwellings miserable!), yet it was wafted faintly into Princess's-place, whispering of nature and her wholesome air, as such things will, even unto prisoners and captives, and those who are desolate and oppressed.

Miss Tox sat down upon the window-seat, and thought

of her good papa deceased — Mr. Tox, of the Customs Department of the public service; and of her childhood, passed at a seaport, among a considerable quantity of cold tar, and some rusticity. She fell into a softened remembrance of meadows in old time, gleaming with buttercups, like so many inverted firmaments of golden stars; and how she had made chains of dandelion-stalks for youthful vowers of eternal constancy, dressed chiefly in nankeen; and how soon those fetters had withered and broken.

Sitting on the window-seat, and looking out upon the sparrows and the blink of sun, Miss Tox thought likewise of her good mama deceased — sister to the owner of the powdered head and pigtail — of her virtues, and her rheumatism. And when a man with bulgy legs, and a rough voice, and a heavy basket on his head that crushed his hat into a mere black muffin, came crying flowers down Princess's-place, making his timid little roots of daisies shudder in the vibration of every yell he gave, as though he had been an ogre hawking little children, summer recollections were so strong upon Miss Tox, that she shook her head, and murmured she would be comparatively old before she knew it — which seemed likely.

In her pensive mood, Miss Tox's thoughts went wandering on Mr. Dombey's track; probably because the major had returned home to his lodgings opposite, and had just bowed to her from his window. What other reason could Miss Tox have for connecting Mr. Dombey with her summer days and dandelion fetters? Was he more cheerful? thought Miss Tox. Was he reconciled to the decrees of fate? Would he ever marry again; and if yes, whom? What sort of person now!

A flush — it was warm weather — overspread Miss Tox's face, as, while entertaining these meditations, she turned her head, and was surprised by the reflection of her thoughtful image in the chimney-glass. Another flush succeeded when she saw a little carriage drive into Princess's-place, and make straight for her own door. Miss Tox arose, took up her scissors hastily, and so coming, at last, to the plants, was very busy with them when Mrs. Chick entered the room.

"How is my sweetest friend!" exclaimed Miss Tox, with open arms.

A little stateliness was mingled with Miss Tox's sweetest friend's demeanor, but she kissed Miss Tox, and said, "Lucretia, thank you, I am pretty well. I hope you are the same. Hem!"

Mrs. Chick was laboring under a peculiar little monosyllabic cough; a sort of primer, or easy introduction to the art of coughing.

"You call very early, and how kind that is, my dear!" pursued Miss Tox. "Now have you breakfasted?"

"Thank you, Lucretia," said Mrs. Chick, "I have. I took an early breakfast" — the good lady seemed curious on the subject of Princess's-place, and looked all round it as she spoke, "with my brother, who has come home."

"He is better, I trust, my love," faltered Miss Tox.

"He is greatly better, thank you. Hem!"

"My dear Louisa must be careful of that cough," remarked Miss Tox.

"It's nothing," returned Mrs. Chick. "It's merely change of weather. We must expect change."

"Of weather?" asked Miss Tox, in her simplicity.

"Of everything," returned Mrs. Chick. "Of course we must. It's a world of change. Any one would surprise me very much, Lucretia, and would greatly alter my opinion of their understanding, if they attempted to contradict or evade what is so perfectly evident. Change!" exclaimed Mrs. Chick, with severe philosophy. "Why, my gracious me, what is there that does *not* change! even the silkworm, who I am sure might be supposed not to trouble itself about such subjects, changes into all sorts of unexpected things continually."

"My Louisa," said the mild Miss Tox, "is ever happy in her illustrations."

"You are so kind, Lucretia," returned Mrs. Chick, a little softened, "as to say so, and to think so, I believe. I hope neither of us may ever have any cause to lessen our opinion of the other, Lucretia."

"I am sure of it," returned Miss Tox.

Mrs. Chick coughed as before, and drew lines on the carpet with the ivory end of her parasol. Miss Tox, who had experience of her fair friend, and knew that under the pressure of any slight fatigue or vexation she was prone to a discursive kind of irritability, availed herself of the pause to change the subject.

"Pardon me, my dear Louisa," said Miss Tox, "but have I caught sight of the manly form of Mr. Chick in the carriage?"

"He is there," said Mrs. Chick, "but pray leave him there. He has his newspaper, and would be quite contented for the next two hours. Go on with your flowers, Lucretia, and allow me to sit here and rest."

"My Louisa knows," observed Miss Tox, "that between friends like ourselves, any approach to ceremony

would be out of the question. Therefore" — Therefore Miss Tox finished the sentence, not in words but action; and putting on her gloves again, which she had taken off, and arming herself once more with her scissors, began to snip and clip among the leaves with microscopic industry.

"Florence has returned home also," said Mrs. Chick, after sitting silent for some time, with her head on one side, and her parasol sketching on the floor; "and really Florence is a great deal too old now, to continue to lead that solitary life to which she has been accustomed. Of course she is. There can be no doubt about it. I should have very little respect, indeed, for anybody who could advocate a different opinion. Whatever my wishes might be, I *could not* respect them. We cannot command our feelings to such an extent as that."

Miss Tox assented, without being particular as to the intelligibility of the proposition.

"If she's a strange girl," said Mrs. Chick, "and if my brother Paul cannot feel perfectly comfortable in her society, after all the sad things that have happened, and all the terrible disappointments that have been undergone, then, what is the reply? That he must make an effort. That he is bound to make an effort. We have always been a family remarkable for effort. Paul is at the head of the family; almost the only representative left — for what am I — *I* am of no consequence" —

"My dearest love," remonstrated Miss Tox.

Mrs. Chick dried her eyes, which were, for the moment, overflowing; and proceeded:

"And consequently he is more than ever bound to make an effort. And though his having done so, comes

upon me with a sort of shock — for mine is a very weak and foolish nature; which is anything but a blessing I am sure; I often wish my heart was a marble slab, or a paving-stone" —

"My sweet Louisa," remonstrated Miss Tox again.

"Still, it is a triumph to me to know that he is so true to himself, and to his name of Dombey; although of course, I always knew he would be. I only hope," said Mrs. Chick, after a pause, "that she may be worthy of the name too."

Miss Tox filled a little green watering-pot from a jug, and happening to look up when she had done so, was so surprised by the amount of expression Mrs. Chick had conveyed into her face, and was bestowing upon her, that she put the little watering-pot on the table for the present, and sat down near it.

"My dear Louisa," said Miss Tox, "will it be the least satisfaction to you, if I venture to observe in reference to that remark, that I, as a humble individual, think your sweet niece in every way most promising!"

"What do you mean, Lucretia?" returned Mrs. Chick, with increased stateliness of manner. "To what remark of mine, my dear, do you refer?"

"Her being worthy of her name, my love," replied Miss Tox.

"If," said Mrs. Chick, with solemn patience, "I have not expressed myself with clearness, Lucretia, the fault of course is mine. There is, perhaps, no reason why I should express myself at all, except the intimacy that has subsisted between us, and which I very much hope, Lucretia — confidently hope — nothing will occur to disturb. Because, why should I do anything else? There is no reason; it would be absurd. But I wish to ex-

press myself clearly, Lucretia; and therefore to go back to that remark, I must beg to say that it was not intended to relate to Florence in any way."

"Indeed!" returned Miss Tox.

"No," said Mrs. Chick shortly and decisively.

"Pardon me, my dear," rejoined her meek friend; "but I cannot have understood it. I fear I am dull."

Mrs. Chick looked round the room and over the way; at the plants, at the bird, at the watering-pot, at almost everything within view, except Miss Tox; and finally dropping her glance upon Miss Tox, for a moment, on its way to the ground, said, looking meanwhile with elevated eyebrows at the carpet:

"When I speak, Lucretia, of her being worthy of the name, I speak of my brother Paul's second wife. I believe I have already said, in effect, if not in the very words I now use, that it is his intention to marry a second wife."

Miss Tox left her seat in a hurry, and returned to her plants; clipping among the stems and leaves with as little favor as a barber working at so many pauper heads of hair.

"Whether she will be fully sensible of the distinction conferred upon her," said Mrs. Chick, in a lofty tone, "is quite another question. I hope she may be. We are bound to think well of one another in this world, and I hope she may be. I have not been advised with, myself. If I had been advised with, I have no doubt my advice would have been cavalierly received, and therefore it is infinitely better as it is. I much prefer it as it is."

Miss Tox, with head bent down, still clipped among the plants. Mrs. Chick, with energetic shakings of her

own head from time to time, continued to hold forth, as if in defiance of somebody.

"If my brother Paul had consulted with me, which he sometimes does — or rather, sometimes used to do; for he will naturally do that no more now, and this is a circumstance which I regard as a relief from responsibility," said Mrs. Chick, hysterically, "for I thank Heaven I am not jealous" — here Mrs. Chick again shed tears: "if my brother Paul had come to me, and had said, 'Louisa, what kind of qualities would you advise me to look out for, in a wife?' I should certainly have answered, 'Paul, you must have family, you must have beauty, you must have dignity, you must have connection.' Those are the words I should have used. You might have led me to the block immediately afterwards," said Mrs. Chick, as if that consequence were highly probable, "but I should have used them. I should have said, 'Paul! You to marry a second time without family! You to marry without beauty! You to marry without dignity! You to marry without connection! There is nobody in the world, not mad, who could dream of daring to entertain such a preposterous idea!'"

Miss Tox stopped clipping; and with her head among the plants, listened attentively. Perhaps Miss Tox thought there was hope in this exordium, and in the warmth of Mrs. Chick.

"I should have adopted this course of argument," pursued the discreet lady, "because I trust I am not a fool. I make no claim to be considered a person of superior intellect — though I believe some people have been extraordinary enough to consider me so; one so little humored as I am, would very soon be disabused of any such notion; but I trust I am not a downright fool.

And to tell ME," said Mrs. Chick with ineffable disdain, "that my brother Paul Dombey could ever contemplate the possibility of uniting himself to anybody — I don't care who" — she was more sharp and emphatic in that short clause than in any other part of her discourse — "not possessing these requisites, would be to insult what understanding I *have* got, as much as if I was to be told that I was born and bred an elephant. Which I *may* be told next," said Mrs. Chick, with resignation. "It wouldn't surprise me at all. I expect it."

In the moment's silence that ensued, Miss Tox's scissors gave a feeble clip or two; but Miss Tox's face was still invisible, and Miss Tox's morning gown was agitated. Mrs. Chick looked sideways at her, through the intervening plants, and went on to say, in a tone of bland conviction, and as one dwelling on a point of fact that hardly required to be stated:

"Therefore, of course my brother Paul has done what was to be expected of him, and what anybody might have foreseen he would do, if he entered the marriage state again. I confess it takes me rather by surprise, however gratifying; because when Paul went out of town I had no idea at all that he would form any attachment out of town, and he certainly had no attachment when he left here. However, it seems to be extremely desirable in every point of view. I have no doubt the mother is a most genteel and elegant creature, and I have no right whatever to dispute the policy of her living with them: which is Paul's affair, not mine — and as to Paul's choice, herself, I have only seen her picture yet, but that is beautiful indeed. Her name is beautiful too," said Mrs. Chick, shaking her head with energy, and arranging herself in her chair; "Edith is at once uncom-

mon, as it strikes me, and distinguished. Consequently, Lucretia, I have no doubt you will be happy to hear that the marriage is to take place immediately — of course, you will:" great emphasis again: "and that you are delighted with this change in the condition of my brother, who has shown you a great deal of pleasant attention at various times."

Miss Tox made no verbal answer, but took up the little watering-pot with a trembling hand, and looked vacantly round as if considering what article of furniture would be improved by the contents. The room-door opening at this crisis of Miss Tox's feelings, she started, laughed aloud, and fell into the arms of the person entering; happily insensible alike of Mrs. Chick's indignant countenance, and of the major at his window over the way, who had his double-barrelled eye-glass in full action, and whose face and figure were dilated with Mephistophelean joy.

Not so the expatriated native, amazed supporter of Miss Tox's swooning form, who, coming straight upstairs, with a polite inquiry touching Miss Tox's health (in exact pursuance of the major's malicious instructions), had accidentally arrived in the very nick of time to catch the delicate burden in his arms, and to receive the contents of the little watering-pot in his shoe; both of which circumstances, coupled with his consciousness of being closely watched by the wrathful major, who had threatened the usual penalty in regard of every bone in his skin in case of any failure, combined to render him a moving spectacle of mental and bodily distress.

For some moments, this afflicted foreigner remained clasping Miss Tox to his heart, with an energy of action in remarkable opposition to his disconcerted face, while

that poor lady trickled slowly down upon him the very last sprinklings of the little watering-pot, as if he were a delicate exotic (which indeed he was), and might be almost expected to blow while the gentle rain descended. Mrs. Chick, at length recovering sufficient presence of mind to interpose, commanded him to drop Miss Tox upon the sofa and withdraw; and the exile promptly obeying, she applied herself to promote Miss Tox's recovery.

But none of that gentle concern which usually characterizes the daughters of Eve in their tending of each other; none of that freemasonry in fainting, by which they are generally bound together in a mysterious bond of sisterhood; was visible in Mrs. Chick's demeanor. Rather like the executioner who restores the victim to sensation previous to proceeding with the torture (or was wont to do so, in the good old times for which all true men wear perpetual mourning), did Mrs. Chick administer the smelling-bottle, the slapping on the hands, the dashing of cold water on the face, and the other proved remedies. And when, at length, Miss Tox opened her eyes, and gradually became restored to animation and consciousness, Mrs. Chick drew off as from a criminal, and reversing the precedent of the murdered king of Denmark, regarded her more in anger than in sorrow.

"Lucretia!" said Mrs. Chick. "I will not attempt to disguise what I feel. My eyes are opened, all at once. I wouldn't have believed this, if a saint had told it to me."

"I am foolish to give way to faintness," Miss Tox faltered. "I shall be better presently."

"You will be better presently, Lucretia!" repeated

Mrs. Chick, with exceeding scorn. "Do you suppose I am blind? Do you imagine I am in my second childhood? No, Lucretia! I am obliged to you!"

Miss Tox directed an imploring, helpless kind of look towards her friend, and put her handkerchief before her face.

"If any one had told me this yesterday," said Mrs. Chick with majesty, "or even half an hour ago, I should have been tempted, I almost believe, to strike them to the earth. Lucretia Tox, my eyes are opened to you all at once. The scales:" here Mrs. Chick cast down an imaginary pair, such as are commonly used in grocers' shops: "have fallen from my sight. The blindness of my confidence is past, Lucretia. It has been abused and played upon, and evasion is quite out of the question now, I assure you."

"Oh! to what do you allude so cruelly, my love?" asked Miss Tox, through her tears.

"Lucretia," said Mrs. Chick, "ask your own heart. I must entreat you not to address me by any such familiar term as you have just used, if you please. I have some self-respect left, though you may think otherwise."

"Oh, Louisa!" cried Miss Tox. "How can you speak to me like that?"

"How can I speak to you like that?" retorted Mrs. Chick, who, in default of having any particular argument to sustain herself upon, relied principally on such repetitions for her most withering effects. "Like that! You may well say like that, indeed!"

Miss Tox sobbed pitifully.

"The idea!" said Mrs. Chick, "of your having basked at my brother's fireside, like a serpent, and wound yourself, through me, almost into his confidence, Lucretia,

that you might, in secret, entertain designs upon him, and dare to aspire to contemplate the possibility of his uniting himself to *you!* Why, it is an idea," said Mrs. Chick with sarcastic dignity, "the absurdity of which almost relieves its treachery."

"Pray, Louisa," urged Miss Tox, "do not say such dreadful things."

"Dreadful things!" repeated Mrs. Chick. "Dreadful things! Is it not a fact, Lucretia, that you have just now been unable to command your feelings even before me, whose eyes you had so completely closed?"

"I have made no complaint," sobbed Miss Tox. "I have said nothing. If I have been a little overpowered by your news, Louisa, and have ever had any lingering thought that Mr. Dombey was inclined to be particular towards me, surely *you* will not condemn me."

"She is going to say," said Mrs. Chick, addressing herself to the whole of the furniture, in a comprehensive glance of resignation and appeal, "She is going to say — I know it — that I have encouraged her!"

"I don't wish to exchange reproaches, dear Louisa," sobbed Miss Tox. "Nor do I wish to complain. But, in my own defence" —

"Yes," cried Mrs. Chick, looking round the room with a prophetic smile, "that's what she's going to say. I knew it. You had better say it. Say it openly! Be open, Lucretia Tox," said Mrs. Chick, with desperate sternness, "whatever you are."

"In my own defence," faltered Miss Tox, "and only in my own defence against your unkind words, my dear Louisa, I would merely ask you if you haven't often favored such a fancy, and even said it might happen, for anything we could tell?"

"There is a point," said Mrs. Chick, rising, not as if she were going to stop at the floor, but as if she were about to soar up, high, into her native skies, "beyond which endurance becomes ridiculous, if not culpable. I can bear much; but not too much. What spell was on me when I came into this house this day, I don't know; but I had a presentiment — a dark presentiment," said Mrs. Chick, with a shiver, "that something was going to happen. Well may I have had that foreboding, Lucretia, when my confidence of many years is destroyed in an instant, when my eyes are opened all at once, and when I find you revealed in your true colors. Lucretia, I have been mistaken in you. It is better for us both that this subject should end here. I wish you well, and I shall ever wish you well. But, as an individual who desires to be true to herself in her own poor position, whatever that position may be, or may not be — and as the sister of my brother — and as the sister-in-law of my brother's wife — and as a connection by marriage of my brother's wife's mother — may I be permitted to add, as a Dombey? — I can wish you nothing else but good-morning."

These words, delivered with cutting suavity, tempered and chastened by a lofty air of moral rectitude, carried the speaker to the door. There she inclined her head in a ghostly and statue-like manner, and so withdrew to her carriage, to seek comfort and consolation in the arms of Mr. Chick her lord.

Figuratively speaking, that is to say; for the arms of Mr. Chick were full of his newspaper. Neither did that gentleman address his eyes towards his wife otherwise than by stealth. Neither did he offer any consolation whatever. In short, he sat reading, and humming

fag ends of tunes, and sometimes glancing furtively at her without delivering himself of word, good, bad, or indifferent.

In the mean time Mrs. Chick set swelling and bridling, and tossing her head, as if she were still repeating that solemn formula of farewell to Lucretia Tox. At length, she said aloud, "Oh the extent to which her eyes had been opened that day!"

"To which your eyes have been opened, my dear!" repeated Mr. Chick.

"Oh, don't talk to me!" said Mrs. Chick. "If you can bear to see me in this state, and not ask me what the matter is, you had better hold your tongue forever."

"What *is* the matter, my dear?" asked Mr. Chick.

"To think," said Mrs. Chick, in a state of soliloquy, "that she should ever have conceived the base idea of connecting herself with our family by a marriage with Paul! To think that when she was playing at horses with that dear child who is now in his grave — I never liked it at the time — she should have been hiding such a double-faced design! I wonder she was never afraid that something would happen to her. She is fortunate if nothing does."

"I really thought, my dear," said Mr. Chick slowly, after rubbing the bridge of his nose for some time with his newspaper, "that you had gone on the same tack yourself, all along, until this morning; and had thought it would be a convenient thing enough, if it could have been brought about."

Mrs. Chick instantly burst into tears, and told Mr. Chick that if he wished to trample upon her with his boots, he had better do it.

"But with Lucretia Tox I have done," said Mrs.

Chick, after abandoning herself to her feelings for some minutes, to Mr. Chick's great terror. "I can bear to resign Paul's confidence in favor of one who, I hope and trust, may be deserving of it, and with whom he has a perfect right to replace poor Fanny if he chooses; I can bear to be informed, in Paul's cool manner, of such a change in his plans, and never to be consulted until all is settled and determined; but deceit I can *not* bear, and with Lucretia Tox I have done. It is better as it is," said Mrs. Chick, piously; "much better. It would have been a long time before I could have accommodated myself comfortably with her, after this; and I really don't know, as Paul is going to be very grand, and these are people of condition, that she would have been quite presentable, and might not have compromised myself. There's a providence in everything; everything works for the best; I have been tried to-day, but, upon the whole, I don't regret it."

In which Christian spirit, Mrs. Chick dried her eyes, and smoothed her lap, and sat as became a person calm under a great wrong. Mr. Chick, feeling his unworthiness no doubt, took an early opportunity of being set down at a street-corner and walking away, whistling, with his shoulders very much raised, and his hands in his pockets.

While poor excommunicated Miss Tox, who, if she were a fawner and toad-eater, was at least an honest and a constant one, and had ever borne a faithful friendship towards her impeacher, and had been truly absorbed and swallowed up in devotion to the magnificence of Mr. Dombey — while poor excommunicated Miss Tox watered her plants with her tears, and felt that it was winter in Princess's-place.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE INTERVAL BEFORE THE MARRIAGE.

ALTHOUGH the enchanted house was no more, and the working world had broken into it, and was hammering and crashing and tramping up and down stairs all day long, keeping Diogenes in an incessant paroxysm of barking from sunrise to sunset — evidently convinced that his enemy had got the better of him at last, and was then sacking the premises in triumphant defiance — there was, at first, no other great change in the method of Florence's life. At night, when the work-people went away, the house was dreary and deserted again; and Florence listening to their voices echoing through the hall and staircase as they departed, pictured to herself the cheerful homes to which they were returning, and the children who were waiting for them, and was glad to think that they were merry and well pleased to go.

She welcomed back the evening silence as an old friend, but it came now with an altered face, and looked more kindly on her. Fresh hope was in it. The beautiful lady who had soothed and caressed her, in the very room in which her heart had been so wrung, was a spirit of promise to her. Soft shadows of the bright life dawning, when her father's affection should be gradually won, and all, or much should be restored, of what she

had lost on the dark day when a mother's love had faded with a mother's last breath on her cheek, moved about her in the twilight and were welcome company. Peeping at the rosy children her neighbors, it was a new and precious sensation to think that they might soon speak together and know each other: when she would not fear as of old, to show herself before them, lest they should be grieved to see her in her black dress sitting there alone!

In her thoughts of her new mother, and in the love and trust overflowing her pure heart towards her, Florence loved her own dead mother more and more. She had no fear of setting up a rival in her breast. The new flower sprang from the deep-planted and long-cherished root, she knew. Every gentle word that had fallen from the lips of the beautiful lady, sounded to Florence like an echo of the voice long hushed and silent. How could she love that memory less for living tenderness, when it was her memory of all parental tenderness and love!

Florence was, one day, sitting reading in her room, and thinking of the lady and her promised visit soon — for her book turned on a kindred subject — when, raising her eyes, she saw her standing in the door-way.

"Mama!" cried Florence, joyfully meeting her. "Come again!"

"Not mama yet," returned the lady, with a serious smile, as she encircled Florence's neck with her arm.

"But very soon to be," cried Florence.

"Very soon now, Florence: very soon."

Edith bent her head a little so as to press the blooming cheek of Florence against her own, and for some few moments remained thus silent. There was some-

thing so very tender in her manner, that Florence was even more sensible of it than on the first occasion of their meeting.

She led Florence to a chair beside her, and sat down: Florence looking in her face, quite wondering at its beauty, and willingly leaving her hand in hers.

"Have you been alone, Florence, since I was here last?"

"Oh yes!" smiled Florence, hastily.

She hesitated and cast down her eyes; for her new mama was very earnest in her look, and the look was intently and thoughtfully fixed upon her face.

"I — I — am used to be alone," said Florence. "I don't mind it at all. Di and I pass whole days together, sometimes." Florence might have said whole weeks, and months.

"Is Di your maid, love?"

"My dog, mama," said Florence, laughing. "Susan is my maid."

"And these are your rooms," said Edith, looking round. "I was not shown these rooms the other day. We must have them improved, Florence. They shall be made the prettiest in the house."

"If I might change them, mama," returned Florence; "there is one up-stairs I should like much better."

"Is this not high enough, dear girl?" asked Edith, smiling.

"The other was my brother's room," said Florence, "and I am very fond of it. I would have spoken to papa about it when I came home, and found the workmen here, and everything changing; but" —

Florence dropped her eyes, lest the same look should make her falter again.

— "but I was afraid it might distress him; and as you said you would be here again soon, mama, and are the mistress of everything, I determined to take courage and ask you."

Edith sat looking at her, with her brilliant eyes intent upon her face, until Florence raising her own, she, in her turn, withdrew her gaze, and turned it on the ground. It was then that Florence thought how different this lady's beauty was, from what she had supposed. She had thought it of a proud and lofty kind; yet her manner was so subdued and gentle, that if she had been of Florence's own age and character, it scarcely could have invited confidence more.

Except when a constrained and singular reserve crept over her; and then she seemed (but Florence hardly understood this, though she could not choose but notice it, and think about it) as if she were humbled before Florence, and ill at ease. When she had said that she was not her mama yet, and when Florence had called her the mistress of everything there, this change in her was quick and startling; and now, while the eyes of Florence rested on her face, she sat as though she would have shrunk and hidden from her, rather than as one about to love and cherish her, in right of such a near connection.

She gave Florence her ready promise about her new room, and said she would give directions about it herself. She then asked some questions concerning poor Paul; and when they had sat in conversation for some time told Florence she had come to take her to her own home.

"We have come to London now, my mother and I," said Edith, "and you shall stay with us until I am mar-

ried. I wish that we should know and trust each other. Florence."

"You are very kind to me," said Florence, "dear mama. How much I thank you!"

"Let me say now, for it may be the best opportunity," continued Edith, looking round to see that they were quite alone, and speaking in a lower voice, "that when I am married, and have gone away for some weeks, I shall be easier at heart if you will come home here. No matter who invites you to stay elsewhere, come home here. It is better to be alone than — what I would say is," she added, checking herself, "that I know well you are best at home, dear Florence."

"I will come home on the very day, mama."

"Do so. I rely on that promise. Now, prepare to come with me, dear girl. You will find me down-stairs when you are ready."

Slowly and thoughtfully did Edith wander alone through the mansion of which she was so soon to be the lady: and little heed took she of all the elegance and splendor it began to display. The same indomitable haughtiness of soul, the same proud scorn expressed in eye and lip, the same fierce beauty, only tamed by a sense of its own little worth, and of the little worth of everything around it, went through the grand saloons and halls, that had got loose among the shady trees, and raged and rent themselves. The mimic roses on the walls and floors were set round with sharp thorns, that tore her breast; in every scrap of gold so dazzling to the eye, she saw some hateful atom of her purchase-money; the broad high mirrors showed her, at full length, a woman with a noble quality yet dwelling in her nature, who was too false to her better self, and

too debased and lost, to save herself. She believed that all this was so plain, more or less, to all eyes, that she had no resource or power of self-assertion but in pride: and with this pride, which tortured her own heart night and day, she fought her fate out, braved it, and defied it.

Was this the woman whom Florence — an innocent girl, strong only in her earnestness and simple truth — could so impress and quell, that by her side she was another creature, with her tempest of fashion hushed, and her very pride itself subdued? Was this the woman who now sat beside her in a carriage, with her arms entwined, and who, while she courted and entreated her to love and trust her, drew her fair head to nestle on her breast, and would have laid down life to shield it from wrong or harm?

Oh, Edith! it were well to die, indeed, at such a time! Better and happier far, perhaps, to die so, Edith, than to live on to the end!

The Honorable Mrs. Skewton, who was thinking of anything rather than of such sentiments — for, like many genteel persons who have existed at various times, she set her face against death altogether, and objected to the mention of any such low and levelling upstart — had borrowed a house in Brook-street, Grosvenor-square, from a stately relative (one of the Feenix brood), who was out of town, and who did not object to lending it, in the handsomest manner, for nuptial purposes, as the loan implied his final release and acquittance from all further loans and gifts to Mrs. Skewton and her daughter. It being necessary for the credit of the family to make a handsome appearance at such a time, Mrs. Skewton with the assistance of an accommodating tradesman resi-

dent in the parish of Mary-le-bone, who lent out all sorts of articles to the nobility and gentry, from a service of plate to an army of footmen, clapped into this house a silver-headed butler (who was charged extra on that account, as having the appearance of an ancient family retainer), two very tall young men in livery, and a select staff of kitchen-servants; so that a legend arose, down-stairs, that Withers the page, released at once from his numerous household duties, and from the propulsion of the wheeled-chair (inconsistent with the metropolis), had been several times observed to rub his eyes and pinch his limbs, as if he misdoubted his having overslept himself at the Leamington milkman's, and being still in a celestial dream. A variety of requisites in plate and china being also conveyed to the same establishment from the same convenient source, with several miscellaneous articles, including a neat chariot and a pair of bays, Mrs. Skewton cushioned herself on the principal sofa, in the Cleopatra attitude, and held her court in fair state.

"And how," said Mrs. Skewton, on the entrance of her daughter and her charge, "is my charming Florence? You must come and kiss me, Florence, if you please, my love."

Florence was timidly stooping to pick out a place in the white part of Mrs. Skewton's face, when that lady presented her ear, and relieved her of her difficulty.

"Edith, my dear," said Mrs. Skewton, "positively, I — stand a little more in the light, my sweetest Florence, for a moment."

Florence blushingly complied.

"You don't remember, dearest Edith," said her mother, "what you were when you were about the same age as

our exceedingly precious Florence, or a few years younger?"

"I have long forgotten, mother."

"For positively, my dear," said Mrs. Skewton, "I do think that I see a decided resemblance to what you were then, in our extremely fascinating young friend. And it shows," said Mrs. Skewton, in a lower voice, which conveyed her opinion that Florence was in a very unfinished state, "what cultivation will do."

"It does, indeed," was Edith's stern reply.

Her mother eyed her sharply for a moment, and feeling herself on unsafe ground, said, as a diversion:

"My charming Florence, you must come and kiss me once more, if you please, my love."

Florence complied, of course, and again imprinted her lips on Mrs. Skewton's ear.

"And you have heard, no doubt, my darling pet," said Mrs. Skewton, detaining her hand, "that your papa, whom we all perfectly adore and dote upon, is to be married to my dearest Edith this day week."

"I knew it would be very soon," returned Florence, "but not exactly when."

"My darling Edith," urged her mother gayly, "is it possible you have not told Florence?"

"Why should I tell Florence?" she returned, so suddenly and harshly, that Florence could scarcely believe it was the same voice.

Mrs. Skewton then told Florence, as another and safer diversion, that her father was coming to dinner, and that he would no doubt be charmingly surprised to see her; as he had spoken last night of dressing in the city, and had known nothing of Edith's design, the execution of which, according to Mrs. Skewton's expecta-

tion, would throw him into a perfect ecstasy. Florence was troubled to hear this; and her distress became so keen, as the dinner-hour approached, that if she had known how to frame an entreaty to be suffered to return home, without involving her father in her explanation, she would have hurried back on foot, bareheaded, breathless, and alone, rather than incur the risk of meeting his displeasure.

As the time drew nearer, she could hardly breathe. She dared not approach a window, lest he should see her from the street. She dared not go up-stairs to hide her emotion, lest in passing out at the door, she should meet him unexpectedly; besides which dread she felt as though she never could come back again if she were summoned to his presence. In this conflict of her fears, she was sitting by Cleopatra's couch, endeavoring to understand and to reply to the bald discourse of that lady, when she heard his foot upon the stair.

"I hear him now!" cried Florence, starting. "He is coming!"

Cleopatra, who in her juvenility was always playfully disposed, and who in her self-engrossment did not trouble herself about the nature of this agitation, pushed Florence behind her couch, and dropped a shawl over her, preparatory to giving Mr. Dombey a rapture of surprise. It was so quickly done that in a moment Florence heard his awful step in the room.

He saluted his intended mother-in-law, and his intended bride. The strange sound of his voice thrilled through the whole frame of his child.

"My dear Dombey," said Cleopatra, "come here and tell me how your pretty Florence is."

"Florence is very well," said Mr. Dombey, advancing towards the couch.

"At home?"

"At home," said Mr. Dombey.

"My dear Dombey," returned Cleopatra, with bewitching vivacity; "now are you sure you are not deceiving me? I don't know what my dearest Edith will say to me when I make such a declaration, but upon my honor I am afraid you are the falsest of men, my dear Dombey."

Though he had been; and had been detected on the spot, in the most enormous falsehood that was ever said or done; he could hardly have been more disconcerted than he was, when Mrs. Skewton plucked the shawl away, and Florence, pale and trembling, rose before him like a ghost. He had not yet recovered his presence of mind, when Florence had run up to him, clasped her hands round his neck, kissed his face, and hurried out of the room. He looked round as if to refer the matter to somebody else, but Edith had gone after Florence, instantly."

"Now confess, my dear Dombey," said Mrs. Skewton, giving him her hand, "that you never were more surprised and pleased in your life."

"I never was more surprised," said Mr. Dombey.

"Nor pleased, my dearest Dombey?" returned Mrs. Skewton, holding up her fan.

"I — yes, I am exceedingly glad to meet Florence here," said Mr. Dombey. He appeared to consider gravely about it for a moment, and then said, more decidedly, "Yes, I really am very glad indeed to meet Florence here."

"You wonder how she comes here?" said Mrs. Skewton, "don't you?"

"Edith, perhaps" — suggested Mr. Dombey.

"Ah! wicked guesser!" replied Cleopatra, shaking her head. "Ah! cunning, cunning man! One shouldn't tell these things; your sex, my dear Dombey, are so vain, and so apt to abuse our weaknesses; but, you know my open soul — very well; immediately."

This was addressed to one of the very tall young men who announced dinner.

"But Edith, my dear Dombey," she continued in a whisper, "when she cannot have you near her — and as I tell her, she cannot expect that always — will at least have near her something or somebody belonging to you. Well, how extremely natural that is! And in this spirit, nothing would keep her from riding off to-day to fetch our darling Florence. Well, how excessively charming that is!"

As she waited for an answer, Mr. Dombey answered, "Eminently so."

"Bless you, my dear Dombey, for that proof of heart!" cried Cleopatra, squeezing his hand. "But I am growing too serious! Take me down-stairs, like an angel, and let us see what these people intend to give us for dinner. Bless you, dear Dombey!"

Cleopatra skipping off her couch with tolerable briskness, after the last benediction, Mr. Dombey took her arm in his and led her ceremoniously down-stairs; one of the very tall young men on hire, whose organ of veneration was imperfectly developed, thrusting his tongue into his cheek, for the entertainment of the other very tall young man on hire, as the couple turned into the dining-room.

Florence and Edith were already there, and sitting side by side. Florence would have risen when her father entered, to resign her chair to him; but Edith

openly put her hand upon her arm, and Mr. Dombey took an opposite place at the round table.

The conversation was almost entirely sustained by Mrs. Skewton. Florence hardly dared to raise her eyes, lest they should reveal the traces of tears; far less dared to speak; and Edith never uttered one word, unless in answer to a question. Verily, Cleopatra worked hard, for the establishment that was so nearly clutched; and verily it should have been a rich one to reward her!

"And so your preparations are nearly finished at last, my dear Dombey?" said Cleopatra, when the dessert was put upon the table, and the silver-headed butler had withdrawn. "Even the lawyer's preparations!"

"Yes, madam," replied Mr. Dombey; "the deed of settlement, the professional gentlemen inform me, is now ready, and as I was mentioning to you, Edith has only to do us the favor to suggest her own time for its execution."

Edith sat like a handsome statue; as cold, as silent, and as still.

"My dearest love," said Cleopatra, "do you hear what Mr. Dombey says? Ah, my dear Dombey!" aside to that gentleman, "How her absence, as the time approaches, reminds me of the days, when that most agreeable of creatures, her papa, was in your situation!"

"I have nothing to suggest. It shall be when you please," said Edith, scarcely looking over the table at Mr. Dombey.

"To-morrow?" suggested Mr. Dombey.

"If you please."

"Or would next day," said Mr. Dombey, "suit your engagements better?"

"I have no engagements. I am always at your disposal. Let it be when you like."

"No engagements, my dear Edith!" remonstrated her mother, "when you are in a most terrible state of flurry all day long, and have a thousand and one appointments with all sorts of tradespeople!"

"They are of your making," returned Edith, turning on her, with a slight contraction of her brow. "You and Mr. Dombey can arrange between you."

"Very true indeed, my love, and most considerate of you!" said Cleopatra. "My darling Florence, you must really come and kiss me once more, if you please, my dear!"

Singular coincidence, that these gushes of interest in Florence hurried Cleopatra away from almost every dialogue in which Edith had a share, however trifling! Florence had certainly never undergone so much embracing, and perhaps had never been, unconsciously, so useful in her life.

Mr. Dombey was far from quarrelling, in his own breast, with the manner of his beautiful betrothed. He had that good reason for sympathy with haughtiness and coldness, which is found in a fellow-feeling. It flattered him to think how these deferred to him, in Edith's case, and seemed to have no will apart from his. It flattered him to picture to himself, this proud and stately woman doing the honors of his house, and chilling his guests after his own manner. The dignity of Dombey and Son would be heightened and maintained, indeed, in such hands.

So thought Mr. Dombey, when he was left alone at the dining-table, and mused upon his past and future fortunes: finding no uncongeniality in an air of scant

and gloomy state that pervaded the room, in color a dark brown, with black hatchments of pictures blotching the walls, and twenty-four black chairs, with almost as many nails in them as so many coffins, waiting like mutes, upon the threshold of the Turkey carpet; and two exhausted negroes holding up two withered branches of candelabra on the sideboard, and a musty smell prevailing as if the ashes of ten thousand dinners were entombed in the sarcophagus below it. The owner of the house lived much abroad; the air of England seldom agreed long with a member of the Feenix family; and the room had gradually put itself into deeper and still deeper mourning for him, until it was become so funereal as to want nothing but a body in it to be quite complete.

No bad representation of the body, for the nonce, in his unbending form, if not in his attitude, Mr. Dombey looked down into the cold depths of the dead sea of mahogany on which the fruit dishes and decanters lay at anchor; as if the subjects of his thoughts were rising towards the surface one by one, and plunging down again. Edith was there in all her majesty of brow and figure; and close to her came Florence, with her timid head turned to him, as it had been, for an instant, when she left the room; and Edith's eyes upon her, and Edith's hand put out protectingly. A little figure in a low arm-chair came springing next into the light, and looked upon him wonderingly, with its bright eyes and its old-young face, gleaming as in the flickering of an evening fire. Again came Florence close upon it, and absorbed his whole attention. Whether as a foredoomed difficulty and disappointment to him; whether as a rival who had crossed him in his way, and might again; whether as his child, of whom, in his successful wooing,

he could stoop to think, as claiming, at such a time, to be no more estranged; or whether as a hint to him that the mere appearance of caring for his own blood should be maintained in his new relations; he best knew. Indifferently well, perhaps, at best; for marriage company and marriage altars, and ambitious scenes — still blotted here and there with Florence — always Florence — turned up so fast, and so confusedly, that he rose, and went up-stairs, to escape them.

It was quite late at night before candles were brought; for at present they made Mrs. Skewton's head ache, she complained; and in the mean time Florence and Mrs. Skewton talked together (Cleopatra being very anxious to keep her close to herself), or Florence touched the piano softly for Mrs. Skewton's delight; to make no mention of a few occasions in the course of the evening, when that affectionate lady was impelled to solicit another kiss, and which always happened after Edith had said anything. They were not many, however, for Edith sat apart by an open window during the whole time (in spite of her mother's fears that she would take cold), and remained there until Mr. Dombey took leave. He was serenely gracious to Florence when he did so; and Florence went to bed in a room within Edith's, so happy and hopeful, that she thought of her late self as if it were some other poor deserted girl who was to be pitied for her sorrow; and in her pity, sobbed herself to sleep.

The week fled fast. There were drives to milliners, dress-makers, jewellers, lawyers, florists, pastry-cooks; and Florence was always of the party. Florence was to go to the wedding. Florence was to cast off her mourning, and to wear a brilliant dress on the occasion. The milliner's intentions on the subject of this dress — the

milliner was a Frenchwoman, and greatly resembled Mrs. Skewton — were so chaste and elegant, that Mrs. Skewton bespoke one like it for herself. The milliner said it would become her to admiration, and that all the world would take her for the young lady's sister.

The week fled faster. Edith looked at nothing and cared for nothing. Her rich dresses came home, and were tried on, and were loudly commended by Mrs. Skewton and the milliners, and were put away without a word from her. Mrs. Skewton made their plans for every day, and executed them. Sometimes Edith sat in the carriage when they went to make purchases; sometimes, when it was absolutely necessary, she went into the shops. But Mrs. Skewton conducted the whole business, whatever it happened to be; and Edith looked on as uninterested and with as much apparent indifference as if she had no concern in it. Florence might perhaps have thought she was haughty and listless, but that she was never so to her. So Florence quenched her wonder in her gratitude whenever it broke out, and soon subdued it.

The week fled faster. It had nearly winged its flight away. The last night of the week, the night before the marriage, was come. In the dark room — for Mrs. Skewton's head was no better yet, though she expected to recover permanently to-morrow — were that lady, Edith, and Mr. Dombey. Edith was at her open window looking out into the street; Mr. Dombey and Cleopatra were talking softly on the sofa. It was growing late; and Florence being fatigued, had gone to bed.

"My dear Dombey," said Cleopatra, "you will leave me Florence to-morrow, when you deprive me of my sweetest Edith."

Mr. Dombey said he would, with pleasure.

"To have her about me, here, while you are both at Paris, and to think that, at her age, I am assisting in the formation of her mind, my dear Dombey," said Cleopatra, "will be a perfect balm to me in the extremely shattered state to which I shall be reduced."

Edith turned her head suddenly. Her listless manner was exchanged, in a moment, to one of burning interest, and, unseen in the darkness, she attended closely to their conversation.

Mr. Dombey would be delighted to leave Florence in such admirable guardianship.

"My dear Dombey," returned Cleopatra, "a thousand thanks for your good opinion. I feared you were going, with malice aforethought, as the dreadful lawyers say — those horrid prosers! — to condemn me to utter solitude."

"Why do me so great an injustice, my dear madam?" said Mr. Dombey.

"Because my charming Florence tells me so positively she must go home to-morrow," returned Cleopatra, "that I began to be afraid, my dearest Dombey, you were quite a Bashaw."

"I assure you, madam!" said Mr. Dombey, "I have laid no commands on Florence; and if I had, there are no commands like your wish."

"My dear Dombey," replied Cleopatra, "what a courtier you are! Though I'll not say so, either; for courtiers have no heart, and yours pervades your charming life and character. And are you really going so early, my dear Dombey!"

Oh, indeed! it was late, and Mr. Dombey feared he must.

"Is this a fact, or is it all a dream!" lisped Cleopatra. "Can I believe, my dearest Dombey, that you are coming back to-morrow morning to deprive me of my sweet companion; my own Edith!"

Mr. Dombey, who was accustomed to take things literally, reminded Mrs. Skewton that they were to meet first at the church.

"The pang," said Mrs. Skewton, "of consigning a child, even to you, my dear Dombey, is one of the most excruciating imaginable; and combined with a naturally delicate constitution, and the extreme stupidity of the pastry-cook who has undertaken the breakfast, is almost too much for my poor strength. But I shall rally, my dear Dombey, in the morning; do not fear for me, or be uneasy on my account. Heaven bless you! My dearest Edith!" she cried archly. "Somebody is going, pet."

Edith, who had turned her head again towards the window, and whose interest in their conversation had ceased, rose up in her place, but made no advance towards him, and said nothing. Mr. Dombey, with a lofty gallantry adapted to his dignity and the occasion, betook his creaking boots towards her, put her hand to his lips, and said, "To-morrow morning I shall have the happiness of claiming this hand as Mrs. Dombey's," and bowed himself solemnly out.

Mrs. Skewton rang for candles as soon as the house-door had closed upon him. With the candles appeared her maid, with the juvenile dress that was to delude the world to-morrow. The dress had savage retribution in it, as such dresses ever have, and made her infinitely older and more hideous than her greasy flannel gown. But Mrs. Skewton tried it on with mincing satisfaction;

smirked at her cadaverous self in the glass, as she thought of its killing effect upon the major; and suffering her maid to take it off again, and to prepare her for repose, tumbled into ruins like a house of painted cards.

All this time, Edith remained at the dark window looking out into the street. When she and her mother were at last left alone, she moved from it for the first time that evening, and came opposite to her. The yawning, shaking, peevish figure of the mother, with her eyes raised to confront the proud erect form of the daughter, whose glance of fire was bent downward upon her, had a conscious air upon it, that no levity or temper could conceal.

"I am tired to death," said she. "You can't be trusted for a moment. You are worse than a child. Child! No child would be half so obstinate and undutiful."

"Listen to me, mother," returned Edith, passing these words by with a scorn that would not descend to trifle with them. "You must remain alone here until I return."

"Must remain alone here, Edith, until you return?" repeated her mother.

"Or in that name upon which I shall call to-morrow to witness what I do, so falsely, and so shamefully, I swear I will refuse the hand of this man in the church. If I do not, may I fall dead upon the pavement!"

The mother answered with a look of quick alarm, in no degree diminished by the look she met.

"It is enough," said Edith, steadily, "that we are what we are. I will have no youth and truth dragged down to my level. I will have no guileless nature un-

dermined, corrupted, and perverted, to amuse the leisure of a world of mothers. You know my meaning. Florence must go home."

"You are an idiot, Edith," cried her angry mother. "Do you expect there can ever be peace for you in that house, till she is married, and away?"

"Ask me, or ask yourself, if I ever expect peace in that house," said her daughter, "and you know the answer."

"And am I to be told to-night, after all my pains and labor, and when you are going, through me, to be rendered independent," her mother almost shrieked in her passion, while her palsied head shook like a leaf, "that there is corruption and contagion in me, and that I am not fit company for a girl! What are you, pray? What are you?"

"I have put the question to myself," said Edith, ashy pale, and pointing to the window, "more than once when I have been sitting there, and something in the faded likeness of my sex has wandered past outside; and God knows I have met with my reply. Oh mother, mother, if you had but left me to my natural heart when I too was a girl — a younger girl than Florence — how different I might have been!"

Sensible that any show of anger was useless here, her mother restrained herself, and fell a-whimpering, and bewailed that she had lived too long, and that her only child had cast her off, and that duty towards parents was forgotten in these evil days, and that she had heard unnatural taunts, and cared for life no longer.

"If one is to go on living through continual scenes like this," she whined, "I am sure it would be much better for me to think of some means of putting an end

to my existence. Oh! The idea of your being my daughter, Edith, and addressing me in such a strain!"

"Between us, mother," returned Edith, mournfully, "the time for mutual reproaches is past."

"Then why do you revive it?" whimpered her mother. "You know that you are lacerating me in the cruellest manner. You know how sensitive I am to unkindness. At such a moment, too, when I have so much to think of, and am naturally anxious to appear to the best advantage! I wonder at you, Edith. To make your mother a fright upon your wedding-day!"

Edith bent the same fixed look upon her, as she sobbed and rubbed her eyes; and said in the same low steady voice, which had neither risen nor fallen since she first addressed her, "I have said that Florence must go home."

"Let her go!" cried the afflicted and affrighted parent, hastily. "I am sure I am willing she should go. What is the girl to me?"

"She is so much to me, that rather than communicate, or suffer to be communicated to her, one grain of the evil that is in my breast, mother, I would renounce you, as I would (if you gave me cause) renounce him in the church to-morrow," replied Edith. "Leave her alone. She shall not, while I can interpose, be tampered with and tainted by the lessons I have learned. This is no hard condition on this bitter night."

"If you had proposed it in a filial manner, Edith," whined her mother, "perhaps not; very likely not. But such extremely cutting words" —

"They are past and at an end between us now," said Edith. "Take your own way, mother; share as you please in what you have gained; spend, enjoy, make

much of it; and be as happy as you will. The object of our lives is won. Henceforth let us wear it silently. My lips are closed upon the past from this hour. I forgive you your part in to-morrow's wickedness. May God forgive my own!"

Without a tremor in her voice or frame, and passing onward with a foot that set itself upon the neck of every soft emotion, she bade her mother good-night, and repaired to her own room.

But not to rest: for there was no rest in the tumult of her agitation when alone. To and fro, and to and fro, and to and fro again, five hundred times, among the splendid preparations for her adornment on the morrow; with her dark hair shaken down, her dark eyes flashing with a raging light, her broad white bosom red with the cruel grasp of the relentless hand with which she spurned it from her, pacing up and down with an averted head, as if she would avoid the sight of her own fair person, and divorce herself from its companionship. Thus, in the dead time of the night before her bridal, Edith Granger wrestled with her unquiet spirit, tearless, friendless, silent, proud, and uncomplaining.

At length it happened that she touched the open door which led into the room where Florence lay.

She started, stopped, and looked in.

A light was burning there, and showed her Florence in her bloom of innocence and beauty, fast asleep. Edith held her breath, and felt herself drawn on towards her.

Drawn nearer, nearer, nearer yet; at last, drawn so near, that stooping down, she pressed her lips to the gentle hand that lay outside the bed, and put it softly to her neck. Its touch was like the prophet's rod of old

upon the rock. Her tears sprung forth beneath it, as she sunk upon her knees, and laid her aching head and streaming hair upon the pillow by its side.

Thus Edith Granger passed the night before her bridal. Thus the sun found her on her bridal morning.

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